North Moreton
East Hagbourne
South Moreton
WALLINGFORD
Crowmarsh
Mongwell
Grim's Ditch
Great Western Railway
Cholsey
North Stoke
Blewburton Hill
Camp
Blewbury
Aston Tirrold
Trunk Drain
Hailey
Ipsden
Icknield Way
Braziers
Moulsford
River Thames
South Stoke
Woodcote
Cleeve
Streatley
Goring
Crays Pond
Cold Harbour
Compton
Aldworth
Gatehampton
Coombe End
Farm
Hill Bo
Basildon
Camp
Hart's Lock
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Gate
Camp
Path
Bozedown
Coombe Park
Great Western Railway
Whitchurch
Hampstead Norris
Ashampstead
Pangbourn
Upper Basildon
River Pang
Yattenden
Tidmarsh
Sulha
Everington
Frilsham
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Englefield
Stanford Dingley
River Pang
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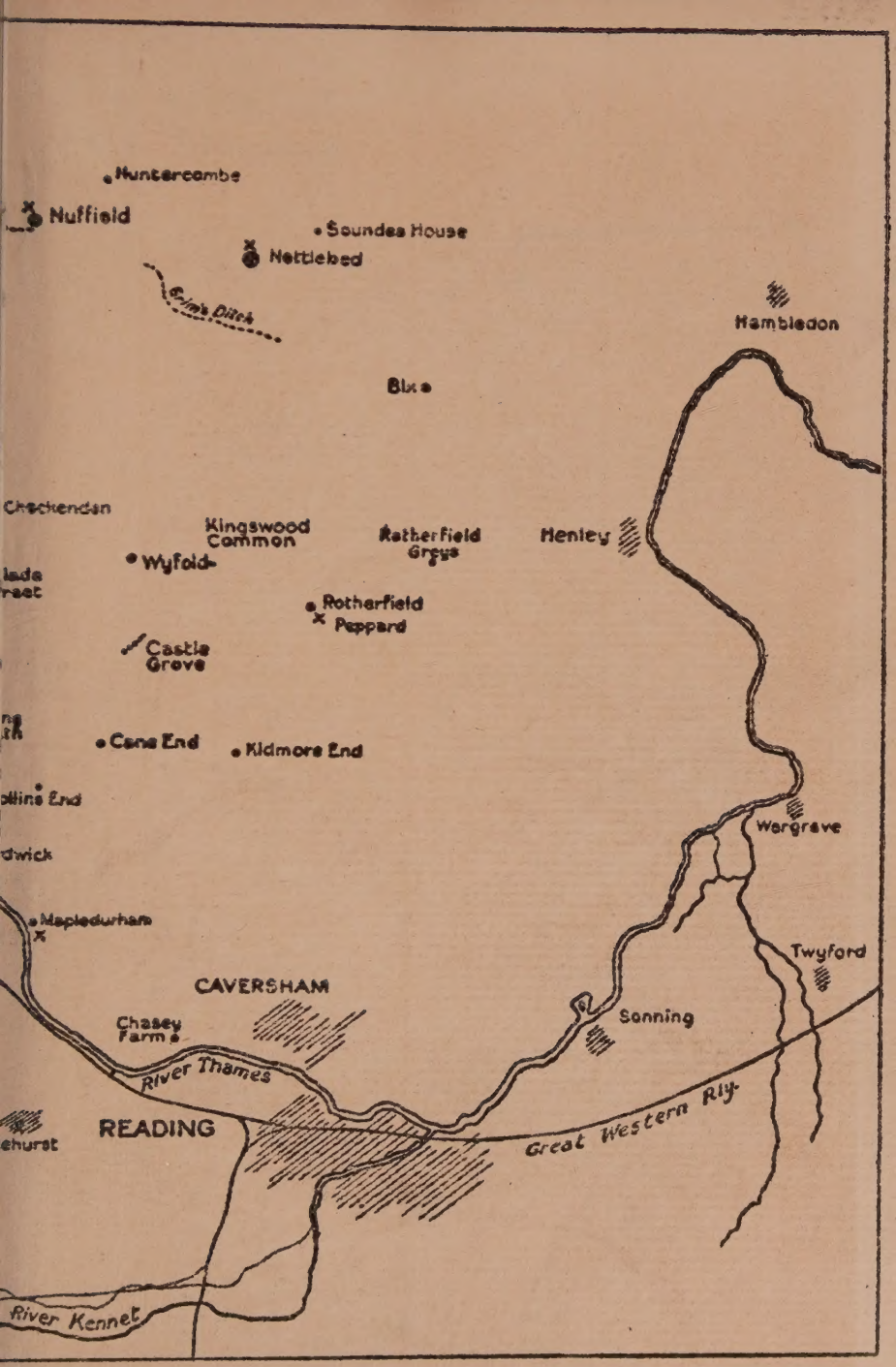
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Rotherfield Peppard
Castle Grove
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A VILLAGE ON THE THAMES

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From a snapshot by Mrs Twiton — Emery Walker ph. sc.

R. J. Godlee in the garden
1923

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A VILLAGE ON THE THAMES

WHITCHURCH, YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

BY

SIR RICKMAN J. GODLEE, BART.

K.C.V.O., M.S., F.R.C.S.

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF LORD LISTER," ETC.

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MEMORIAL SKETCH

RICKMAN JOHN GODLEE

Written at the time of his death, by
Sir GEORGE NEWMAN, K.C.B.

"AN able man is a man who can do things, and his ability to do things is dependent on what he has in him. What he has in him depends on what he started with and what he has done to increase and discipline it." And again, "business exists not for profit but for service." I have remembered these words when I think of Rickman John Godlee. He was a man who did things and, with fewness of words, turned his profession into service.

He was the son of Rickman Godlee, barrister of the Middle Temple, and Mary, daughter of Joseph Jackson Lister, the father of Lord Lister, and he was born in Queen Square, London, on April 15, 1849. He went to the Quaker school, Grove House, Tottenham, and was brought up in that sweet old time, that serene atmosphere, which characterized the comfortable Quaker home of the early and middle nineteenth century. He himself, in after years, depicted it admirably in his biography of Lister. Like others of his Quaker contemporaries, he went to University College, London, and in 1867 took the B.A. degree. At that college and hospital also he studied Medicine, becoming a Member of the College of Surgeons in 1872. He won the gold medal with his degree of Master in Surgery and filled

the usual house appointments which fall to the successful student. Then he went to Edinburgh to learn of the new methods which were being introduced into surgery by his uncle, Professor Lister. That may be considered the beginning of the long and happy association of uncle and nephew in joint surgical work. Lister had left Glasgow for the Edinburgh professorship in surgery in 1869, when Godlee was twenty, and the great man did not come to London until 1877, when Godlee was Assistant Surgeon at University College Hospital. But from that date until he died in 1912 Lister had in Godlee a nephew who was almost son. The elder man watched over the career of the younger with paternal care and tenderness, and directed his studies. The younger man assisted his uncle in his active surgical practice in Park Crescent, Portland Place, tended his private patients, wrote to his dictation, daily witnessed his skill in the operating room and the laboratory, and vigilantly watched the growth of his revolutionary discovery. No man among all Lister's friends, disciples or critics had so perfect an opportunity of studying the evolution of the antiseptic system as Godlee. No man has more ably presented it or done more to give it accurate and permanent record for all time. Godlee became the exponent and interpreter of Lister.

It must not be supposed, however, that Godlee failed to determine his own sphere or became merely a shadow of Lister. His own remarkable gifts, his industry, his thoroughness and accuracy, his manifold labours carried him steadily to the head of his profession. He performed some of the earliest operations on the chest and the brain. He became Surgeon and Professor of Surgery at University College. He filled all the chief posts at the Royal College of Surgeons of England and in 1911

reached the highest position as President of the College, a very pleasing thing for Lister in the evening of his day. Godlee's fame as a surgeon, both in Wimpole Street and in connection with the various hospitals to which he was attached, brought him in due course upon the staff of Queen Victoria's Household, and subsequently he was appointed Surgeon in Ordinary to King Edward VII and to King George V. He was created a baronet in 1912 and two years later was appointed by His Majesty's pleasure a Knight Commander of the Victorian Order. During his term of office as President of the College of Surgeons he and Lady Godlee visited America as the guests of the medical profession in the States, a journey which was described to me by an American surgeon as " like a royal progress." He became greatly respected and admired in his profession in two continents and as biographer of Lister he became known even more widely. His friends knew him better still, and by them he was beloved.

And now, quite suddenly, in the full enjoyment of his well-earned leisure, he has left us.

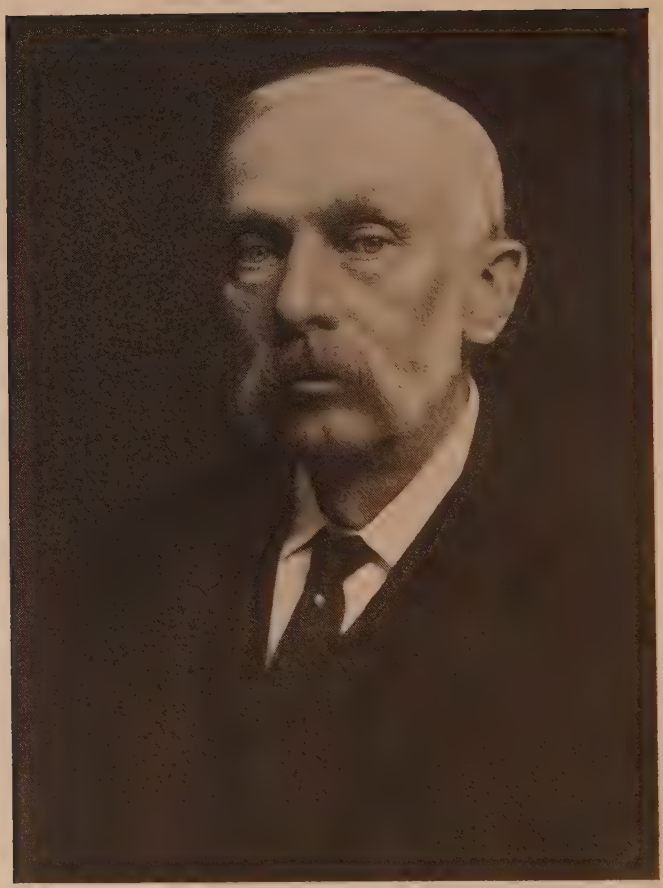
I look back over thirty years' acquaintanceship with Godlee, ripening into friendship. On the whole, I subscribe to the picture which a friendly hand wrote in *The Times* a few days ago.

> " Rickman Godlee was a remarkable man. His Quaker ancestry and upbringing left their marks upon him. Scrupulously honest in thought and conscientious in detail, he took nothing for granted that he had not himself investigated. Quiet in manner, reserved in character, and rather sarcastic, he was apt to be underestimated in early life by those who only knew him superficially. His sterling

worth came to be recognized later, and he showed himself a firm but dignified and courteous ruler during his term of office as President of the Royal College of Surgeons. He was not only a good surgeon and a fine artist, but he was a linguist, a carpenter, a poet, a botanist, an ornithologist, and an oarsman, while his great knowledge of books made him an admirable honorary librarian at the Royal Medico-Chirurgical Society and its successor, the Royal Society of Medicine. He was a valued member of the Burlington Fine Arts Club, and was elected to the Athenæum under Rule II in 1912. Lister's Life could have been written only by Godlee, whose veneration for his uncle was unbounded. He alone knew the minute details of his life and practice, for as a young man he was usually left in charge of the patients on whom Lister had operated in private. With access to his papers and letters, and from personal recollections, he could reconstruct the simple life led by members of the Society of Friends, which is so charming a feature of his *Life of Lord Lister*."

Yes, that is the man. But I must add that there was something warmer, gentler and more tender than is here set forth, and there were deep springs. On the front page of the *Life of Lord Lister* Godlee printed these words from one of Lister's addresses to Edinburgh students in 1876 :

"If we had nothing but pecuniary rewards and worldly honours to look to, our profession would not be one to be desired. But in its practice you will find it to be attended with peculiar privileges ;



Messrs. Elliott & Fry, Ltd.

Rikmans. Godlee.

1910

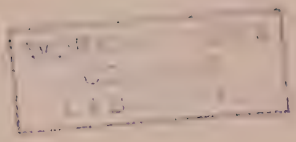
> second to none in intense interest and pure pleasures. It is our proud office to tend the fleshly tabernacle of the immortal spirit, and our path, if rightly followed, will be guided by unfettered truth and love unfeigned. In the pursuit of this noble and holy calling I wish you all God-speed."

Such terms interpret Godlee as well as Lister. He had hidden power and concealed ideals, and only rarely would he open a window in his heart. Reserve, reticence, innate modesty, humour, and a characteristic manner clothed the outward form of a very true and fine man. "Firm, thorough and steady" was the verdict of an old medical friend a few days ago, and he added, by way of explanation, "and a very *good* man too." Honours and fame left him unchanged—a great test. Nor did he ever leave the old path of his upbringing in strict honesty and integrity. A Quaker born, he remained to the end a Quaker. And his Quakerism was expressed, though not much vocally, in the best of all forms—in life and work.

In 1891, rather late in life, he married Juliet Mary Seebohm, daughter of Frederic Seebohm, of Hitchin, the historian, and the happiest years began, years of high endeavour and glad partnership in work and play. To her he dedicated the immortal book. Much of the play was at Whitchurch in Oxfordshire, above the Thames, and there they made a charming home, a place of rest after heavy toils in London. The coombe runs down by leafy ways through sloping beech-woods to the river, the garden spreads itself on the sides of the hill and is a haunt of ancient peace. "Come and see what he left behind," said one. We had come from a lovely country churchyard; we had seen the large

gathering of sorrowing friends and neighbours, including some of the great physicians and surgeons of the time, we had witnessed the dignified salute of the King's representative, we had said farewell to that which is mortal. And, to see what he left behind, we stepped into a sunlit garden, glorious and glowing and radiant with spring flowers and the song of birds; fragrant with memory; and beyond, the long line of blue hills on the horizon. Then we knew again that death is the gate of life, that love and truth can never die, and that their immortal service is rendered by a life of devotion to diligence and duty. And that is what he left behind.

G. N.



FOREWORD

THE author's purpose in these little articles (called by him "Whitchurch, Yesterday and To-Day") was to share with others his own keen interest in the local history of the neighbourhood. He had no thought of publishing them, but so many requests have been made for them that it seems right to do so. The first eight are of specially local interest, but the rest have a wider application.

They were written for the parish magazine as the result of a conversation with the Rector, who, in confident expectation, announced them from the pulpit, after which there could be no drawing back. Then, having once begun, the difficulty was to stop. A well-stored mind, with windows open on all sides and an ever-youthful keenness about everything around him, provided inexhaustible material, and in spite of all his occupations, which were many and various, he would sometimes be prepared for more than one month ahead, as was the case when he died.

Disconnected and "scrappy" as they are, it seems best to give them just as they came fresh from his pen, with only such corrections as he made himself afterwards or would certainly have wished to make. With the help of his cousin, Miss Gulielma Lister, who has passed her affectionate and searching eye over them, I may hope that not many errors have escaped for which he would have been sorry.

The precious years of leisure here were all too short.

He had known and loved this country from his youth, and his dream had been to retire before any disabilities of age should overtake him, but the war came and kept him hard at work till it was over.

When at last he was able to leave London and make this our only home, his content in the beauty and peace of it was unbounded. The days were not long enough for all he wanted to do in farm and garden and the country round, and with his books. At the same time he kept up all his London interests, going regularly to committee meetings, and always coming back warmed by contact with friends and colleagues there. One of his last occupations was writing his contribution to the history of University College to commemorate its centenary.

He enjoyed his friendly country neighbours too, in the village and all around. As one of them says : " He probably never knew how much he helped people. . . . I never came away from a talk with him without feeling that I had learnt something more than knowledge." And amongst the many friends who visited us here and spoke of him as host—of his " lovely fun," his " deep goodness," his " many-sidedness "—a young cousin writes : ". . . How thankful I am that I had that week-end at Coombe End and got to know Cousin John better. He was amazingly kind. It was a great experience. When I was younger I used to be afraid of him, but this time he might have been my own age. One of the first things he said when I told him something about the electric light engine was, ' There now, I have learnt something from you already.' I shall not forget the day I spent with him. He was untiringly delightful."

And Mrs. Arnold-Forster speaks of another side of

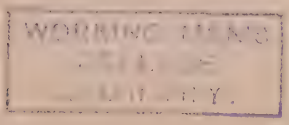
him : " I have a beautiful remembrance of you both in your boat on the river on that summer-autumn Sunday last autumn, when, moored under the bank, he read to us the Psalms and some prayers and part of the Gospel. It brought great Peace of mind to me at the time, and the thought of that reverent faith and of that clear sincerity which one felt underlay his religion and underlay his life, gave me the glad and tranquil feeling that worshipping in a cathedral sometimes gives one, and with it the sense of the meaning of the Communion of Saints. It is a beautiful memory of him to keep."

That it did not take long to make a friend of him is evidenced on all sides. Dr. Harvey Cushing, of Boston, U.S.A., writes : " Do you realize . . . that we never saw him more than half-a-dozen times—that summer at Loch Inver, when we found you sketching ; then here at our home the year he came over to launch our American College ; and once when I had a charming evening with you in London ? Yet it seems as if we were the oldest of life-long friends. It is some intangible quality that enables men of his kind to make that sort of impression on people. . . . I know of no man for whom there has been a more widespread love and affection on the part of the profession he so much adorned."

If his spirit may still speak through these little essays, and they may possibly induce other country-lovers to do the same for their own neighbourhood, their publication will have been justified.

JULIET M. GODLEE

Coombe End Farm,
Whitchurch,
Oxon.



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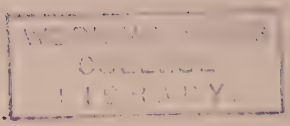


A VILLAGE ON THE THAMES

WHITCHURCH, YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

I

APRIL 1921

THE LAND WHEREON WE DWELL

Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.—ISAIAH li. 1.

THERE are few more interesting things than heaps of stones picked off the fields for road-mending; but who stops to look at them? Here in Whitchurch they are mostly flints—white, black or brown; some irregularly shaped with sharp or with blunt edges; others rounded into pebbles by being tumbled about in streams or on sea-shores; and yet others which are clearly fossils of shells, sponges, sea-urchins and other sea creatures. Besides flints the searcher might find lumps of sandstone, called "sarsen stones," like the large "grey wethers" often set up near farm-houses as mounting stones; and perhaps dark metallic lumps called *pyrites*; by good luck he might happen upon a

flint implement chipped by ancient man, and, if he does, I beg him to bring it to me.

Closer examination might show him that the stones were not the same in different parts of the parish, and he might be led to ask what the soil is like in the fields from which they were picked.

Starting from the bridge and going up Whitchurch hill as far as the Coldharbour lane, he would pass over no less than six different soils. First a narrow strip of the gravelly "alluvium," such as the river is depositing to-day; before reaching the Rectory he would come to an older coarser gravel with sarsen stones, "valley gravel"; about Whitchurch House crops out the chalk, of which a good view can be seen behind the School House; the chalk goes almost to the Bozedown lodge, and then comes a long stretch of clayey gravel with angular flints, "plateau gravel"; this is followed by an ancient deposit of fine sands and clays of various colours, "Reading beds"; and just before the Coldharbour lane is a narrow strip of another gravel with white pebbles as well as flints, wrongly called on the geological map, "pebble gravel," really probably "clay with flints."

So we have plenty of variety, and it by no means follows that one man can grow in his garden or his farm exactly what another can, or that the season which suits us at the top of the hill will be good for the inhabitants of the valley, or that the chalk or basic slag, or artificial manures for the matter of that, will have the same effect on one field as on another.

Whitchurch is on the chalk. Let us first inquire therefore what chalk is. "Carbonate of lime," of course answers the chemist. But under the microscope it is found to be almost entirely made up of the skeletons

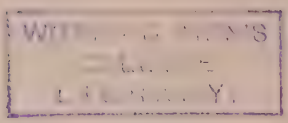
of millions of minute marine animals, and thus we know for certain that it was formed at the bottom of the sea. It was deposited very slowly. It has been calculated from what is taking place in other oceans, that not more than one inch is formed in a year. If this be true, our four hundred feet of chalk must have been nearly five thousand years in forming, and ours is only what is called " upper chalk " (except a little near Hart's Lock) and we do not see nearly to the bottom of the chalk in our lowest pits.

Let us pause for a minute to think what this means. Our Whitchurch chalk was for ages and ages at the bottom of a sea, great and wide, but probably not deep, " wherein were things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts." It is the shells and skeletons and remains of these that provided the flints and fossils we find, and which are abundantly shown at the Reading Museum. All this is certain, but we can only guess where the shores of this sea were, or whether our present mountain ranges stood out as islands or not. It is also almost certain that (except upon such possible islands) a level layer of chalk stretched from France to Ireland, whereas now it is only found in our eastern counties and west along the Chiltern Hills and Salisbury Plain to Dorset, with some traces of it occurring also in County Antrim and the Isle of Skye.

In order to account for the disappearance of the chalk over the northern and western parts of England, and the deposit of gravels and clays on the top of it here, we must suppose that the crust of the earth buckled or crumpled, pushing the sea bottom higher and higher till it became dry land, but more in the north and west than in the south and east. Then rains fell upon it, and plants and animals came, and lakes

were formed, and streams which washed away the surface of the chalk and deposited their gravels and clays and rolled them about in all directions from the higher to the lower ground.

Another, and perhaps the most powerful, agent in grinding off the chalk and depositing clays and moving stones about, was the Great Ice Age. Geologists are never tired of guessing about the causes of this chilly period, but they are agreed that many thousand years ago the greater part of England was covered with a thick cap of ice. It probably came to Whitchurch ; it certainly reached Bristol. While it lasted, all the land animals were banished and vegetation was at a stand-still. Once at least during this period the cold was interrupted and animal and vegetable life returned. At last the ice cap went away for good, and, since then, rain and snow, lakes and rivers, plants and animals, especially worms, to say nothing of man, are accountable for the very considerable changes that have taken place on the surface of this part of England.



II

MAY 1921

THE ANCIENT THAMES

He overturneth the mountains by the roots. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks.—JOB xxviii. 9–10.

STANDING in my garden and looking south, I often try to realize what was to be seen when the chalk of the Chiltern Hills was at last pushed up out of the sea, and the ocean waves were beating up the coombe. There was, of course, no one here to see what gravels, clays or sands had been laid down on the chalk while the sea was becoming shallower and shallower during the process of slow upheaval. Some of the monstrous reptiles of the chalk period whose day was almost if not quite over, may have possibly followed the rising shore; some sea-going crocodile may have put his eyes above the water; or a toothed bird or flying lizard may have hovered above the vegetation that gradually spread over the country as it became dry land. But man had not yet appeared upon the scene. The land sloped gradually down from Pyrton and Nettlebed, and from the sandy shore there was nothing but a waste of waters.

When England had risen up bodily above the ocean, it was at first joined to France. Afterwards when, owing to subsidence, it became an island, and the sea

had receded to something like its present shores, the view from this spot would have included a very large river indeed, and on its banks a tropical vegetation instead of our oaks and beeches, for it was very hot at Whitchurch in those days, and hot-country beasts, including tigers, prowled amongst the palm trees, while the hippopotamus did actually plunge about in our river.

In process of time—that is a very long time—the river settled down more or less to its present course, and a most remarkable course it is. Amongst our other privileges is that of living in one of the most interesting parts of the Thames valley, perhaps the most interesting of all. It is the only narrow part; where, after loitering about the plains of Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, the river makes a dead set at the Chilterns and bursts through the "gorge or gap of Goring" to reach the flat on the other side, and follow its uneventful course by the Kent and Essex marshes to the sea. It has been suggested that this was not always the case, but that in former times, it used to avoid this mountain barrier and, after joining up with the waters of the upper Severn and the Dee, make its way into the sea at the Wash. If this be true, and a glance at any map which gives the lie of the hills shows the reasonableness of the suggestion, and if the Thames had continued to follow its original course, we should have had no river here at all or at most a paltry brook like the Pang. It would therefore not be foolish to say that the Thames valley below Whitchurch is really the Kennet valley and that the lower valley of the Pang really belongs to the Kennet which, after reaching Pangbourne, turned south-east to Reading; its present course from Theale to Reading being a sort of afterthought.

THE COOMBE

From a sketch by J. M. Godlee

But this is mere speculation. Let us return to certainties. We know that the temperature became lower and lower and the great ice-cap came nearer and nearer. Oaks and beeches replaced the tropical forests; the tropical animals died or migrated south and their places were taken by the mammoth and reindeer and other arctic beasts, and, if the ice-cap reached as far as Whitchurch, even this arctic life could not have endured, but there would have been silence and desolation beneath the encroaching glaciers for many many years.

Whether man made his appearance in these parts before the glacial period set in we do not know; but he was certainly here in the temperate interval between the two coldest times, and he has been busy here ever since. He was a primitive sort of man; he probably had not much to say for himself, and he certainly could not speak English. We do not know much about him. There is no evidence as to where he lived or how he was clothed; but he was a hunter, that is clear, and he was busy on the gravel terraces by the river side shaping his flint implements (palæolithic). Sometimes he dropped them far from the quarries in which they were made, and as they are indestructible you may find them scattered about to-day as good as new. I picked one up myself on one of our ploughed fields, which in those old days was probably a forest. Flint implements of a later date (neolithic) are not infrequently found on the surface of the ground.

These gravel terraces were the result of alternating periods of flood and drought due to the melting of the ice and one cause and another. They are found at various heights above the stream, and the gravels of which they consist vary very much. They are better

developed at Caversham, Maidenhead, Wargrave and other places, where large numbers of flint implements and bones have been found. There is one in this coombe, thirty feet or more above the river, where layers of sand, deposited when the river was flowing slowly, alternate with beds of rounded flints from far away west deposited when the stream was in heavy flood. There is another more recent bed within a stone's throw of the river, scarcely raised above its present level, just where the alluvium meets the valley gravel. Here amongst rounded and rolled flints and sandstones and fossil oyster shells, parts of a human skeleton have been discovered. There are not enough bones to determine to what race he or she belonged. So, as one looks at these relics of humanity, one wonders did they belong to a very early man who was drowned while the gravel was being laid down, or do they represent a burial? It is a wild lonely swampy spot, not a likely place for a proper funeral service either in Saxon or in Roman times. Perhaps we are assisting at the last stage of some modern or semi-modern tragedy like that of Eugene Aram.

For I knew my secret then was one
That earth refused to keep:
Or land or sea, though he should be
Ten thousand fathoms deep.

* * *

Aye, though he's buried in a cave,
And trodden down with stones,
And years have rotted off his flesh,—
The world shall see his bones.

NOTE OF LATER DATE.—Most probably it was a burial, as the bones were all close together. Roman coins are found in digging at Hart's Lock Cottage. Young Barrett found a brass coin of Vespasian there in October 1922.

III

JUNE 1921

ANCIENT EARTHWORKS

The palaces shall be forsaken . . . the forts and towers shall be dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks.—ISAIAH xxxii. 14.

IN the palmy days of the "topper," and it may happen to-day amongst those who still cling to the "bowler," those who swopped hats, by accident or design, might find them rocking from side to side if they were long-headed, or fore-and-aft if they were short-headed. As is well known, we are a thoroughly mixed race. When Tennyson said "Saxon and Norman and Dane are we," it was a very meagre description of the Briton. He left out the earliest inhabitants. Shall we call them our ancestors? It is not necessary to do so. For as, fortunately, no one now pretends that the chimpanzees or the orang-utans or the gorillas were our actual ancestors, so there is no need for us, if we would rather not, to claim as our blood relations the men who lived in caves by the river or wattle houses in the woods and fashioned the rough flint implements we have already spoken about. They, at all events, were a long-headed race, and, for my own part, I am more pleased than disappointed if I find some other man's hat rocks on my head from side to side. Perhaps one

of my neighbours may be prouder still if the borrowed bowler rocks on his from before backwards when he learns that the short-headed people coming from the direction of Northern Germany—Normans and Teutons and the rest—drove the aboriginal long-headed Celts to the north and west of our islands. But before this happened there was much intermarriage, and just as in cattle-breeding particular characters can never be got rid of, and just as the liability to particular diseases is handed down from generation to generation, though sometimes a generation or two is skipped, so it is with long-heads and short-heads. You may see whole families of one or the other variety, or some long and some short in the same family. In a south-country village like ours, though the greater number may come half-way between the two, both types will certainly be met with, but the short-headed Saxon type is more likely to prevail for precisely the same reason as the long-headed Celtic type abounds in the western parts of Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

There must have been plenty of people living here in those early days. Rivers were always attractive to primitive folk. But, not only have all traces of their dwellings vanished, we do not even know how they disposed of their dead. In other parts of the county, and along the Hampshire Downs which bound our southern horizon, there are many "barrows" or "tumuli" where the chiefs and their wives (and possibly slaves) were buried, with arms and ornaments and sometimes pottery, perhaps to hold imaginary food for them upon their long journey. Sometimes skeletons are found in them, sometimes only a few ashes in earthenware vessels. The long-headed race made what are known as the "long barrows," and

their short-headed successors the "round barrows." Hundreds of such barrows are scattered over the country, the nearest to us in Oxfordshire being at Chinnor. But, even if we had our own barrows, they would only account for a few local chieftains. As for the rank and file, the kindly processes of nature and the practice of cremation dealt very thoroughly with their bodies, and they have entirely disappeared from the scene.

But the ancient Britons left many permanent traces behind them; for example, in the names of places and of people and in a certain number of words now in common use. They also threw up extensive earthworks which remain to this day, the meaning of which has been long forgotten; but they should not be allowed to escape our notice, for we have, in this immediate neighbourhood, two rather remarkable examples of them which seem, so far, to have been missed by those who are working at the subject. Let us, therefore, briefly describe them.

Upper and lower Whitchurch, taken together, occupy a rounded promontory bounded to the south by a bold bend of the river, two and a half miles long, as it leaves the "Gap of Goring." The upper village is in the middle of a wide plateau, the sides of which descend steeply, especially near Hart's Lock and Path Hill. The lower village possessed all the benefits that the river offered: fishing, the means of transport and the ferry, and, as civilization advanced, possibly some well-watered meadows on the flat land. But it had one disadvantage, namely, that it was easily approachable by enemies coming up the Thames valley. The upper village, on the other hand, was less liable to attack because it was surrounded by forests, which, however,

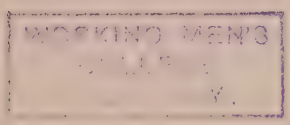
abounded with wolves well on into Norman times. Our two forts, if they were indeed forts, are placed one on the north-western and the other on the south-eastern borders of the promontory and, speaking with the boldness of an amateur archæologist, I venture to suggest that they were places of refuge for the inhabitants of both the upper and lower villages and their flocks and herds in case of attack either from the river or from inland. They are of similar shape, each being rather like a pair of carpenter's calipers. The tips of the calipers reach in the northern camp to the two hundred-foot line, and in the southern camp to the three hundred-foot line, and in both cases the descent into the valley is quite steep, especially in the northern one ; so that they would be safe from attack from the side of the river. The two legs of the calipers and the river front thus enclose two triangles of about ten and twenty acres respectively. The so-called " ramparts " are now rounded mounds of stones and earth, varying in height, but on an average about ten feet high, and about thirty feet wide at the base. Each mound has a ditch outside it of about the same width as its base, but not as a rule more than six or eight feet deep and often shallower. If we remember that the mound will have been lowered and the ditch filled up in the course of centuries, and if we conjure up the picture of wooden stockades on the tops of the mounds, it is clear that such fortifications would have afforded strong protection against the attacks of foes armed with only bows and arrows or flint missiles ; or against the attacks of wild beasts, if, as some think, their purpose was more agricultural than military.

Unfortunately there is no record of any " finds " in these enclosed areas from which they may be dated. All the archæologists will allow is that they were made

before the Roman conquest of Britain. As to our ignorance of their object, that need cause no surprise when we learn that the purpose of that imposing earthwork known as Grim's Ditch, which runs south-east from Wallingford near Ipsden and on towards Nettlebed, was lost in obscurity by the time of Richard I.

There is, by the way, a straight bank and ditch about six hundred yards long, something like a small bit of Grim's Ditch ruuning south-west from Stapnell's Farm; but a well-known authority on earthworks will have nothing to say to it, though, for my own part, I have no doubt that it is a "genuine antique."

The investigation of earthworks, on foot or on a bicycle, is a fascinating pursuit, as may be gathered from a book on the field archæology of Hampshire by Dr. J. P. Williams-Freeman: a name not unknown in Whitchurch. Dorchester, Blewburton Hill, Wallingford and Silchester are within easy reach; so is a good example of one of these so-called "hill-forts" in Castle Grove, Wyfold Wood. This is close to the road and easily accessible. It is of a pointed oval shape open at the north end, the opening being occupied by a pond in which the surrounding beech trees are beautifully reflected. The ditch is deep and wide, which accounts for its being marked "Moat" on the ordnance survey map.



IV

JULY 1921

ROADS AND PATHWAYS

They have made them crooked paths.—ISAIAH lix. 8.

No line or compass traced its plan;
With frequent bends to left or right,
In aimless, wayward curves it ran,
But always kept the door in sight.
OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

WHO made the roads and footpaths that form such an intricate and irregular network over our countryside? And why do they run so crookedly? These are easy questions to ask but difficult ones to answer. A glance at the map shows how fine the network is except where sundry parks have, so to say, widened its meshes; and in them also there are paths which at one time were public, and not so long ago either.

Let us first try to explain why roads and pathways are crooked. The Britisher, as a matter of fact, does not walk straight by nature; I mean physically, not morally. He gets there in the end, but not by the shortest route. Every year I plough up a "right of way" and watch with interest the new meandering path which the unsteady wayfarer makes across the field to Coldharbour. Of course he does not fail to reach his

COOMBE END FARM, FROM THE COOMBE

destination, though indirectly, the moral of which I leave to the Rector, while reminding him that some paths may have followed the tracks of wild animals through the forests.

Our country roads were no doubt footpaths to begin with, and that is one reason why they twist and turn as they do. Another is because homesteads and fields and woods were casually enclosed and footpaths had to go round them instead of across them. Almost all the straight roads in this part of England, if they were not made by the Romans, are modern. We have practically no straight roads in this parish, unless we include that which runs from Whitchurch Gate to Woodcote, and this is so far modern that it is not much more than a hundred years old. There are, however, plenty of straight Roman roads near at hand. Several pass to and from Silchester. Parts of the Bath Road are Roman; and it is said (on what evidence I know not) that the road from Theale to Pangbourne is Roman. Such statements are often made groundlessly, though it should be easy to settle the point by examining the foundations. We cannot expect map-makers to make such investigations; and yet unfortunately what is printed on a map is apt to be taken as gospel truth.

There are many points of interest about the roads in our village, but precise information about them is difficult to obtain. No county map of Oxfordshire before that of Philip Lea published in 1680 shows any roads at all, and the nearest roads to us marked upon it are one which goes from Caversham to Wallingford via Checkendon, and the very old British road known as the Icknield Way, which runs near the foot of the Chilterns all the way from the east of England to the Marlborough Downs and even further. In a pleasant

morning's walk, map in hand, you may trace the Icknield Way by Ewelme and Ipsden to Goring where it crossed the Thames by a ford or ferry at the end of "Ferry Lane," a spot where Reading steamers often land their passengers for picnic teas; but it would take too long to describe in detail its course through Goring and Streatley. Nothing approaching to accurate road maps were made till 1760, but some good ones appeared between that date and 1790, from which a good deal may be learned. Briefly, the chief points of local interest are these:—

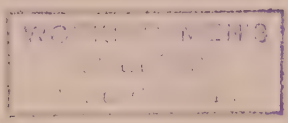
1. A very old bridle road which comes from Crowmarsh and probably further, crosses the Icknield Way at Goring, runs through Hart's Lock Woods and above Coombe Park and is continued as the Hardwick Road and through Mapledurham to Caversham. It is almost certainly a British road connecting the villages on the left bank of the Thames, keeping, as was usual, well above the level of floods and on the sunny side of the hills. It passes near the two hill-forts we spoke of last month. Unlike the Icknield Way, which in some places is still used but in others is hardly to be made out, it is still quite complete. In the maps of 1760 to 1790 it is marked as a high road.

2. The street that runs through our village, in which according to an old book "there are many respectable dwellings of the middle character," went to a ferry which started from the "hard" or strand just above the bridge and passing below the two islands reached a corresponding "hard" on the Berkshire side, from which the road passed, and still passes, by Mr. Saunders's house and the Club-house, where it joins the road again from the bridge to Pangbourne village.[1]

[1] See No. VIII.

The road over the bridge is the property of the bridge company and was made when the old wooden bridge was built in 1793. Before that time it was illegal for anyone except the authorized ferryman to ferry passengers across the river, and I am not aware that the Act of Parliament which imposes a fine for so doing has ever been repealed.

3. The road up Whitchurch Hill was no doubt in old times just a rough track between the lower and upper villages. There are indications of how its level and direction have been altered, in the high pathways on the right-hand side as we mount the hill and on the left-hand side as we turn the corner, near the top, to which our attention has been lately rather acutely directed. These paths are clearly the remains of the old road and give an idea of its roughness and steepness. Many of us can remember some of the changes which have gradually improved its surface and gradients. In 1790, after splitting as it does now at Whitchurch Gate, its two short limbs were continued as far as the base of the "Triangle" and then came abruptly to an end. Whether there was ever a gate or not I do not know. If there was one, or if there were two, the object would have been to prevent the cattle straying from the wide stretch of open country known as Goring Heath, over which there were tracks or paths which we must not attempt to trace on the present occasion because to do so would open up the thorny subject of commons and enclosures.



V

AUGUST 1921

COMMONS AND WASTE LAND

Is not the separate property of a thing the cause of its endearment? Does anyone respect a common as much as he does his garden?—SOUTH.

A HUNDRED and twenty years ago, in fact at least as late as 1806, our grandparents, and even the parents of some of our "oldest inhabitants," would have had to cross a wide stretch of open common in order to reach Checkendon. Nominally this waste land was divided into three parts: (1) Whitchurch Common, about one hundred and ten acres, extending from the "Triangle," "The Barracks" and Copyhold Farm to Hill Bottom and slightly beyond. (2) Goring Heath proper, reaching from Coldharbour on the west to the Almshouses on the east, and northwards about as far as Cray's Pond. (3) Woodcote Common, a patch of irregular shape, quite narrow at Cray's Pond end and extending up to Woodcote and Exlade Street.

Over this common ran many tracks, marked with faint dotted lines on the old maps. On those of 1769 and 1797 they do not precisely correspond with one another. Some are clearly the forerunners of the present roads, for example, that which runs from Goring to Goring Heath, and that which runs from Woodcote

to Goring Heath. But the rest have either disappeared, or are represented only by some of the innumerable footpaths across fields or through the woods, or by portions of the present roads. The chief track to Woodcote seems to have prolonged the road on the right side of the Triangle, that is the present road from Whitchurch Gate to Goring Heath, and to have been continued as the lane that turns to the left at the Post Office, skirts Common Coppice (a suggestive name), passes through Great Oaks and is then prolonged as the winding road by the clay pits in Friar Hampstead Wood, and the reservoirs on Green Moor Hill. The present Woodcote Road was probably engineered when Goring Heath was enclosed at a date I have not yet ascertained.

Goring Heath with its two commons formed one of the waste lands which, in early days, covered a great part of England, and of which there are a few remaining in this part of Oxfordshire, such as Kingswood Common and Peppard Common, and still more on the other side of the river, such as those of Bucklebury and Ashampstead. Most of them, however, are now only represented by their names. It would be as vain to search for a gibbet on Gallows-tree Common as for Tyburn-tree at Hyde Park Corner, but they probably have both witnessed gruesome sights. Such names linger on in cities. Bethnal Green, Cambridge Heath, Hackney Downs, Bunhill Fields, Lavender Hill, and many others, are the names of some of the smokiest and most densely populated parts of London.

The waste lands or commons belonged theoretically to the lords of the manors, that is, they had certain definite rights over them ; but so also had the inhabitants of the adjoining villages. In early days only those who owned or leased arable land possessed rights over

the commons, but in later times they were claimed by and granted to those who had no arable land at all. There were three principal rights of the commoners: (1) The right of pasture, which was the most valuable, and was strictly limited to the number of horses, oxen, cows and sheep, necessary for the ploughing and manuring of the fields of the commoner. (2) The right of taking wood for repairing the tenement, or the carts, ploughs and other implements belonging to him; and toppings and chippings for fuel. (3) The right of cutting turf for fuel. It would seem that these rights must have been rather limited for the inhabitants of Whitchurch, unless their beasts were allowed to graze all over the common by mutual arrangement with the adjoining villages.

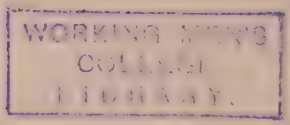
The public also had access to the commons. And so, unfortunately, had the gipsies and other undesirable people. Some of these squatted on the commons, and, if they were left undisturbed for a long time, acquired a sort of right over the enclosures they had made. Farmers and others living on the borders of the commons were also apt, either legally or illegally, to enclose attractive bits of land, and, as this had been going on at least as far back as the thirteenth century and notably since the time of Queen Elizabeth, the area of waste land of the country had very much diminished.

We have wandered out of the Parish of Whitchurch on to Goring Heath in the attempt, not so far quite successful, to find out the whole history of the Woodcote Road. It is time for us to return within our own borders. In Brewer's *Topographical and historical description of the County of Oxford*, published without date about 1815, we read: "This village has lately been much

improved, in consequence of an Act of Parliament, obtained for the purposes of enclosing the common and commonable (i.e. that may be held in common) lands, and of erecting a bridge over the River Thames to form a communication with the opposite village of Pangbourne. The bridge was built in 1793, of oak timber, and is bordered on each side with a balustrade. The whole is conspicuous for neatness, and for lightness of effect." As a matter of fact, there were two Enclosure Acts, that of 1800 and that of 1810, both passed after the old bridge was built. These dusty old documents are not without interest for us. Here and there sentences occur which draw a vivid picture of the village as it then was. Take, for example, the opening words of the Act in 1810. " Whereas there is in the Parish of *Whitchurch*, in the County of *Oxford*, a certain Common called *Whitchurch Common*, which consists of One hundred and ten Acres or thereabouts, and is lying in an uncultivated State ; and there are divers other Pieces or Parcels of Waste Land or Common, containing together about Seven Acres lying within the same Parish, which are in the same uncultivated State : And whereas *Samuel Gardiner* Esquire, is Lord of the Manor of *Whitchurch* aforesaid, and as such is entitled to the Right of the Soil of the said Common and Pieces or Parcels of Waste Land and Common, and the Trees, Timber, Underwood, and other Produce growing and being thereon " . . . It then goes on to speak of " the Reverend *Hugh Moises* Clerk, the present Rector," and " the Dean and Canons of *Windsor* " who owned land in the Parish, and Percy Lybbe Powis, and " divers other persons " who were " seised of, interested in, or otherwise entitled to Rights of Common of Pasture in, upon, and over the said Common and Waste Lands in

respect of their Lands in the said Parish." All of whom were very much alive in 1810, and no doubt greatly agitated about the burning question of enclosure.

The object of the very numerous Enclosure Acts passed about that time was to do away with the old "open or common field system" of husbandry, under which one man might have a dozen or more small strips of land scattered over various parts of the arable fields, and to give him in exchange a compact property contained, as the saying is, "within a ring fence." They also dealt with the setting of hedges, the making of fences, the preservation of public gravel pits and ponds, the formation of roads, and many other matters which can hardly be understood without some knowledge of what a village community was like in very early days.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VI

SEPTEMBER 1921

OPEN OR COMMON FIELDS

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

GRAY.

WHY do we still call the field on the east side of Whitchurch Hill "The Linches"? And why do we find the following names of fields in large print on the plan of the parish made after the Enclosure Act of 1800: Park Field, Pinnocks Field, East Field, Moor End Field, Bozedown Field, Blackmore Field and Common Mead? They are relics of the time when the husbandry of Whitchurch, like that of most of the villages in this part of England, was carried out on the "open" or "common field" system, which may, very roughly indeed, be thus described. Those who had to do with the land as owners or occupiers were the lord of the manor, the parson or parish priest, and the rest of the inhabitants. The lord of the manor had his "demesne" or private estate, but outside this he and the parson owned, and the rest of the inhabitants owned or leased, parts of the "common fields," and had rights of pasturage on the "common mead," as

well as rights of pasturage on the common or waste land referred to last month. The "common fields" occupied the whole, or at all events the greater part, of the agricultural land in the neighbourhood. They were generally divided up into large fields, as seems to have been the case here—East Field, Bozedown Field, and so on. Each of these was again subdivided into a multitude of small strips. The normal size and shape of each strip was a statute acre forty rods long and four rods wide, in fact a roughly cut acre of the proper shape for ploughing, so that an accurate map of open fields looked more or less like a cobweb or a patchwork quilt. But the strips were not always of this exact shape and size; there were half-acre strips and strips of more than an acre, and long and short strips and pieces of irregular shape. They were not separated from one another by hedges or fences, but by green "balks" of unploughed turf, which involved a shocking waste of land. The waste was greatest when the whole or a part of an "open field" was on a hill side. In such a case the strips were almost always made to run horizontally, not up and down. The custom for ages and ages had always been to turn the sod of the furrow down hill, the plough returning one way idle. Thus every year's ploughing took a sod from the higher edge of the strip and put it on the lower edge, and the result was that the strips on a hill side became, in time, long level terraces one above another, and the balks between them grew into steep banks of long grass often covered with natural self-sown brambles and bushes. These banks were generally called "lynches," "linches" or "linces" and the word was often applied to the terraced strips themselves which then went by the name of "the linches." Striking examples of these terraces may be seen on the steep sides of the Chiltern Hills,

and standing on the top of our " Linches," I think—but perhaps it is only fancy—I can still see the lines of the terraces one above the other as the light catches them, and picture to myself the ploughs with their teams of eight oxen crawling slowly along them.

So much for " the linches." As to the six named fields mentioned above, it is to be noted that in the old, old days, i.e. before and after the Norman Conquest, some of the arable fields were fallowed every year, and there was already a sort of two-year, or often a three-year, rotation. The fact of there being six named fields in Whitchurch suggests that there was a three-year system here and that four fields were cropped and two fallowed every year. But this is only a guess.

At that time and for centuries afterwards, although the strips of land belonged to different individuals, the ploughs belonged to the community. Before horses were used for the purpose all the ploughing was done by oxen. Eight oxen formed a team ; though why so many were required to cut their shallow furrows it is difficult to say. A farm might consist of one hundred and twenty acres or less, made up of these small strips. They were not all side by side, but scattered amongst the strips of other people all over the common fields ; a most inconvenient plan, but intended to prevent all the best land falling to one man. A farmer of one hundred and twenty acres—who may have been a knight—had to supply eight oxen, which was supposed to be enough for cultivating this amount of land. Smaller men provided fewer oxen for the common ploughs in proportion to the size of their farms. Thus a farmer of thirty acres—a very common size for a holding—would send two oxen, and so on.

We come now to the practical working of this system. It is interesting to note, in this year of outrageous

drought and heat, when those who were lucky (shall we say), or particularly spry, finished their harvest by August Bank Holiday, that in those remote times August 1st was fixed as the day when all the crops were supposed to have been gathered. Any temporary fences which had been put up round the big fields or parts of them during the summer were then thrown down, and all the stubbles became common grazing ground for the flocks and herds of the community for the next six months. Hence they were called " Lammas Fields." Lammas is derived from hlàf-mass, that is loaf-mass or bread-mass. Lammas Day, August 1st (old style, corresponding to our August 14th), was observed as a harvest festival in the early English Church at which loaves of bread, made from the first ripe corn, were consecrated.

In Domesday Book, prepared for William the Conqueror in 1086, it is said of Whitchurch that " there is land for fifteen ploughs." That means one hundred and twenty draught oxen for our little village if all its eighteen hundred acres were actually cultivated ; and you may well wonder how they and the milch cows and the pigs and sheep were fed. There was a wood two furlongs long and one furlong broad where the pigs had a happy time under the care of the village swineherd. The winter food of the cattle was apparently chiefly hay. The common mead which ran all along the river bank was subdivided amongst the villagers during the summer. The hay harvest, according to some authorities, was supposed to be over by Old Midsummer Day (that is our July 7th). After that the meadows became common grazing ground till they were shut up again for hay in the middle of February. At the same time, whatever the explanation, it must be noted that old meadows are often called

Lammas Lands as if they also were thrown open on August 1st. Of course the rough grazing ground on the common was available for what it was worth all the year round.

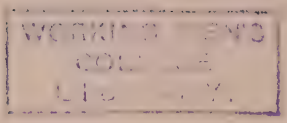
This method of husbandry was all very well in the sleepy old " Middle Ages " when the seasons were perhaps earlier than they are now, and when practically the only crops were wheat (autumn sown) one year, followed by barley, oats, or rye, and then a fallow. A few peas and beans may have been grown, but roots, grasses and cabbages were unknown, and there were no potatoes before Sir Walter Raleigh brought them to Ireland in 1585. It was a different matter, however, when farming was carried on more or less on modern lines, and swedes were introduced from Sweden (about 1785) and other corn besides wheat was sown in the autumn. Fancy how farmers must have enjoyed seeing other people's cattle trapesing over their stubbles and ploughed land from Lammas-tide till Lady Day. Either there were many quarrels or they were better tempered than they are to-day !

These words taken from the Goring Enclosure Act are surely true enough—" And whereas the Lands and Ground in the said Open Common Fields and Common Meadows lie intermixed and dispersed ; and would be advantageous to the several Owners thereof, and of the said Open Common Fields, Common Meadows, Cow Commons, Linchets, and Pieces or Parcels of Waste Land or other Ground, intermixed with or adjoining to the said Common Fields and Common Meadows, if the same were divided, allotted, and inclosed, etc."

And yet, though enclosure was of the greatest benefit to agriculture it cannot be denied that the Acts were

sometimes worked in such a way as to cause hardship to some of the poorer landless inhabitants of the villages.

NOTE.—For further information about land-tenure see Seebohm's *English Village Community* (Cambridge University Press).—J. M. G.



VII

OCTOBER 1921

LOCKS AND WEIRS

Clear and cool, clear and cool,
By laughing shallow and dreaming pool;
Cool and clear, cool and clear,
By shining shingle and foaming weir.
KINGSLEY.

NO one knows when locks were invented or where they were first used: perhaps in the great canals which were made for the sake of irrigating the sun-baked lands of Babylon, Egypt or India in very ancient days, or perhaps in Italy [1] or Holland in the Middle Ages. Weirs, at all events, are amongst the earliest devices of man even before he became properly civilized. Perhaps our ancestors learned the lesson from the beaver which cuts down trees and dams up streams in order to make his winter quarters safe. He is an inhabitant of Europe, Northern Asia and North America, and was common in England even in Saxon times; indeed there is no reason why he should not be common still except that his fur is so valuable. A few of our country towns and villages are named after the beaver, such as Beverley in Yorkshire and Beveridge in Wiltshire.

[1] The great Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci devised six locks for uniting the canals of Milan in 1489.

There are those who hold that Baverstock on the Nadder near Salisbury means a beaver's dam. It is by no means certain, but it seems likely enough, for stake or stoke in such names as North Stoke, South Stoke, etc., almost certainly refers to dams or weirs which in this part of the Thames were made of chalk and wooden stockades; and this brings us back to our river, and incidentally to our Rector.[1]

If it be asked why weirs were ever made in the Thames it may be said, though it is scarcely an answer, that they served three purposes: (1) for catching fish; (2) to hold up water for the mills; (3) to make the river navigable for larger craft than the simple canoe or coracle or raft of the savage. But it is doubtful which kind of weir came first, though probably it was the fish-weir stretching only part of the way across the stream. Relics of these are still to be seen in the eel-bucks such as used to exist, and I think exist still, near Chasey Farm a mile above Caversham. The ancient Briton would naturally think of fish-weirs, for fish was a much more important article of diet in his day than it is now. Moreover they used wastefully to catch small fry and give them to their pigs. One may guess that the miller's weirs came next, built all across the stream, and that their effect upon navigation was only recognized after they were made. Anyhow free passage up and down the Thames had to be provided for. It was the King's highway, and one of the chief highways between London and Oxford when the country roads were so atrocious. So weir builders, who seem to have thrown out these obstructions in a very promiscuous way by taking French leave, were forced to arrange for boats and barges passing through them. This was done by means of what were

[1] Rev. E. P. Baverstock.

THE CHURCH AND MILL-STREAM, WHITCHURCH

WHITCHURCH LOCK AND SWAN INN, PANGBOURNE

known as "flash-locks," or "flush-locks." These consisted of wide spaces in the weirs closed by movable sluices, or paddles or rymers. When a boat was to pass through, the movable tackle was raised or removed and there was a wild rush or flush of water through the sluice-gates. A boat could not pass up or down till the level of the water was the same or nearly the same on each side of the weir, and it is easy to imagine what this meant when the fall at the weir was great or the reach above a long one. In going down you went through at a great pace, and it was ticklish work to steer. I have done it at the old weir at Eaton below Lechlade. For once in a while it was amusing, but it was a slow performance. In passing up vessels had to be towed or wound up by a winch; or light boats might be punted up. When barges of seventy to two hundred tons burden had to go through it was a heavy business, and gangs of often undesirable men used to loaf about the weirs waiting for the job of hauling them up. The waste of water and waste of time was terrible; and when the weirs, as was often the case, belonged to the millers the unfortunate travellers were at their mercy as to the time they were kept waiting (it might be days) and the money they had to pay. The extortionate millers were looked upon by the bargees as their natural enemies whom they scornfully called "sellers of water." Many Acts of Parliament were passed to clear the river of these troublesome obstructions. But vested interests are hard things to deal with, and for many a long year the journey by water from London to Oxford was very tedious and very costly.

We in England were characteristically slow in adopting the present form of lock, known as the "pound lock." A very few were made in the seventeenth century and

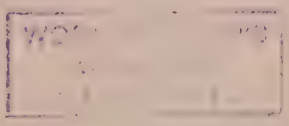
then no more till the end of the eighteenth; up to which time, in fact up to the early part of the nineteenth century, nearly all the locks on the Thames were flash-locks. Those who are interested in the subject can consult three instructive books on *The Thames Highway* by Mr. Fred S. Thacker, to whom I am indebted for many facts here stated. I must now leave the general subject and consider the two locks in our own district.

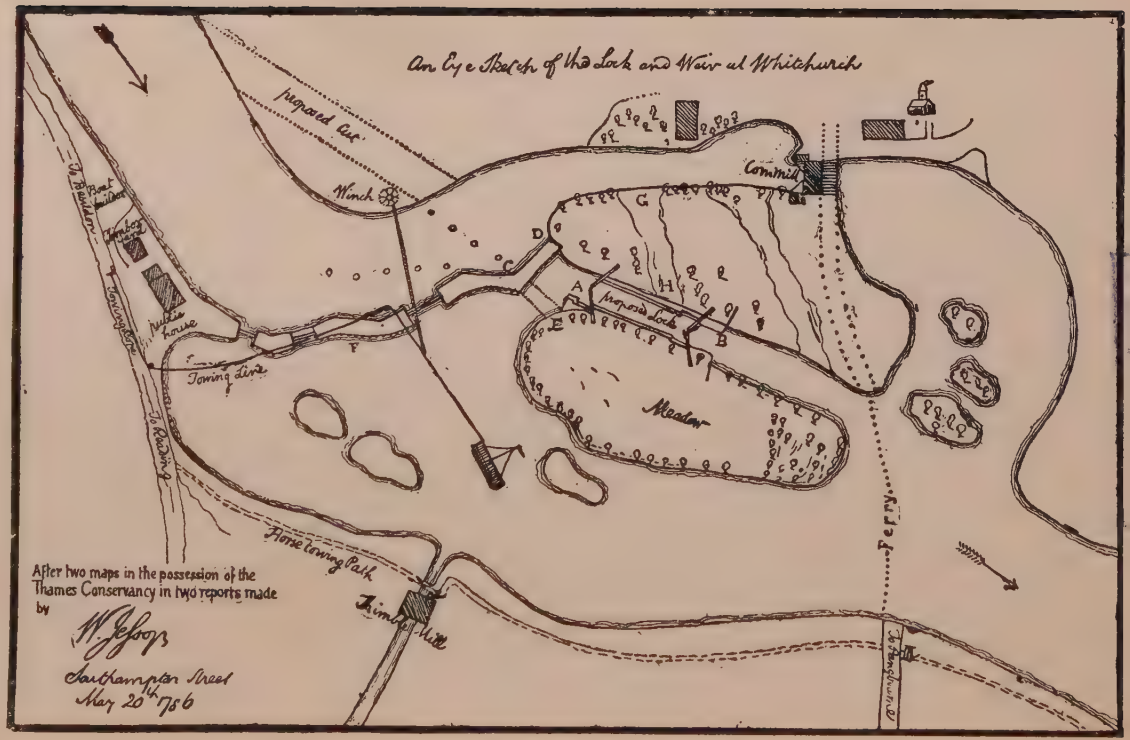
Hart's Lock was a very old affair. It was said in the time of Henry IV that John de Shelford (lord of Gatehampton and Rumford) and his ancestors had owned a lock at Gatehampton from time immemorial. This was probably Hart's Lock. There were also two mills higher up on the Berkshire side. In punting along this, the right bank of the river, one meets with a deep hole near the upper end of the main group of Hart's Lock islands, in which a stranger may easily lose his pole or go overboard himself. I thought this might be the old weir-pool; but from information kindly supplied at the office of the Thames Conservancy, it is clear that the weir was lower down. They say that the place is still marked by the little square bay on the Oxfordshire side opposite the island which has the largest group of willows, about fifty yards above the parish boundary. There used to be another island here in mid-stream on which were large willows. They blew over in a gale some years ago, turning up the edge of the island bodily into the air and obstructing the stream badly till the whole island was removed by dredging.

There were several people of the name of Hart—some seven or eight—who owned weirs in different parts of the Thames in old days. History tells us nothing about *our* old Hart, or whether he or she lived in the cottage below the islands still known as "Hart's Cot-

tage." The lock was called Hart's Lock in 1580 and was then owned by Hugh Wysler, one of a family of whom we may have more to say. It was originally a fish-lock. In 1791 it was said to be "free and open," in other words it had fallen into decay, and the narrator adds, "it was a Pen and Wear formerly; a Tumbling Solid Wear; and two Sets of Bucks and Gates." In 1795 it was decided that "if the proprietors of the Fishery would provide guard piles and repair the lock the Commissioners will not remove the lock." In 1804 they ordered the removal of the timber work which was evidently a great nuisance and source of danger. But the work of removal was not then completely carried out, for Mr. Thacker saw and photographed some of the last piles which were drawn in 1910, and he was told that some still remained under water near the left bank. I have searched for them but failed to find them, although the water has been so low this summer; there is, however, a bank of large lumps of chalk rock, no doubt from the great chalk pit close by, which bears out the statement of the Thames Conservancy as to the exact position of the weir.

The interesting subject of Whitchurch Lock must be put off till the next number.




An Eye Sketch of the Lock and Weir at Whitchurch
proposed Cut
Winch
Commill
Boat builder
Timber Yard
Public house
Towing Line
To Boulder
To Reading
Horse towing Path
Timber Mill
Meadow
proposed Lock
Ferry
To Pangbourne
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
After two maps in the possession of the Thames Conservancy in two reports made by
W. Jessop
Southampton Street
May 20th 1786

VIII

NOVEMBER 1921

WHITCHURCH LOCK AND WEIR

From thence to *Hart's* locke downward we descended,
And next to *Whitchurch* locke which must be mended,
Because the waters turn so swift and various,
And gainst our wils to dangerous courses cary us:
Next there's a weare [Hardwick] that if it had its right
Should be well lib'd, or else removed quite

JOHN TAYLOR, 1632.

AS you thread your way amongst the countless islands of Clew Bay the sailors tell you there are three hundred and sixty-five of them, and add with hardly a smile, "three hundred and sixty-six in leap year." There is the same uncertainty about the islands, eyots, or aits, between Whitchurch and Pangbourne in the wide river pool for which the Pang is perhaps partly accountable. After studying old and modern maps and listening to local tradition one is driven to two conclusions: First, that changes in shape, size and even number of the islands have taken place and are still going on; and second, that old map-makers were very careless. Amongst some papers preserved by the late Canon Slatter is a rough map under which he has written "As it was in 1626," but no history is attached to it. It shows one large island instead of the two now separated by the lock and lock-cut. All later

maps give more or less the present arrangement, except that in the older ones two or three small islands are figured, as in the accompanying map, at the east end of the island next the mill. All four have now joined into one island, and this is gradually extending itself downwards towards the bridge. The number, size and position of the islands on the Berkshire side are given differently on different maps. The Whitchurch end of the bridge rested upon an island ; but the channel which separated it from the mainland was so narrow as to be almost negligible. Below that a part of the shore nearly four hundred yards long is called in Canon Slatter's papers " Bridge Eyott," but there is no indication that it was ever surrounded by water. The name, which cannot be ancient, occurs in the " Award " of 1806.

The old " flash lock " dated from time immemorial and was used till 1787. Mr. Thacker has unearthed a note of 1695 (no reference given) which quotes the toll at " Whitchurch Locks and Turnpikes " as two shillings. Now *turnpike* was another word for *pound-lock*, but there is no mention of a pound-lock here for nearly a hundred years. Still three such locks *were* made between Burcot and Oxford in the early part of the seventeenth century, and it is just possible that they began to construct one at Whitchurch then. It is also just possible that this may account for the large undivided island in the older map.

This " flash lock " was, to all intents and purposes, the weir as it exists to-day, except that it followed the line C.D. in the map [1] and that the part C.E. had not

[1] Constructed from two rough maps attached to two reports by Mr. Jessop on the proposed new lock, dated 1786, in the possession of the Thames Conservancy, who have kindly given me leave to make use of them. G.H., a ditch which runs almost across the mill island is not referred to in the text.

been constructed. The passage for boats and barges is indicated by the cable passing from the winch. If you stand on this part of the weir and look down stream straight in front of you, the eye rests upon Mr. Franklin's landing stage or upon a spot a little lower down. Let us now see how a barge was navigated through the weir. First it was towed along the horse-towing-path (which was completed as far as Pangbourne in 1780) almost up to Mr. Franklin's shed. Then a towing-rope was taken to the weir and passed *above* the first of the two posts or pulleys shown on the map just above the weir, not far from the letter F. The rope was next passed *below* the second of the two posts which stood on the mainland near "The Swan public-house." Men or horses hauling on this rope would draw the barge up to the passage through the weir. Either now or at an earlier stage the paddles were removed at the various openings in the weir and down came the water in a rush or flash until the level was practically the same on both sides. It is appalling to think what this meant. It meant no less than the lowering of the level of the water right up to the next lock and putting the mill out of action. Naturally the millers did not like it. One wonders what happened if barges wanted to go up at Goring and down at Whitchurch at the same time, for there were no telegraphs or telephones in those days, nor even a penny post. When the water was low enough a stout hawser was fixed to the barge and it was drawn up through the opening by means of a winch which stood on the left bank, as indicated in the map, in a field still called the "Winch Field," where it is shown in some old drawings. For this purpose men were given free passage across the ferry or bridge. The process was completed by taking the towing-rope

across the river to the men or horses waiting on the tow-path to proceed on their slow journey to the next lock.

When it was decided to have a modern or "pound lock" three plans were discussed: (1) To place it close to the mill by cutting the mill island in two and making a long cut across the meadows behind the winch; (2) to construct it on the Berkshire side, but the "tumbling pool" would have been awkward for navigation and it would have involved buying "The Swan" at a cost of £600; (3) the plan actually adopted (A.B.), with a short cut behind the winch, which was not carried out.

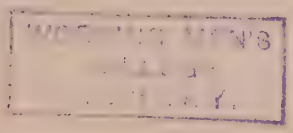
The following estimates may interest builders and those who want to build. The expense of a camp-siding from C. to D. and supporting the river below "where it is occasionally cut away by an eddy," £400. A lock of timber, £1,056; of stone, £1,700; of brick, with stone quoins and stone coping, £1,150. In December 1786 it was reported that the "lock of timber" was recently built, which means, I believe, brick or elm under water and oak between wind and water.

The old wooden locks were picturesque, but rather dangerous. There was little to hold on to, and some risk of breaking the back of your boat if it got across the lock. The present brick lock with its smooth and slippery sides was made in 1877.

Turning now to other matters connected with our present subject; the map shows the ferry passing across the lower end of the mill island, over the mill bridge and along the road which leads from the mill past a block of building which was the "Ferry-house," and so to the main road. This is not as I described it in No. IV, following, without sufficient inquiry, the common report. The ferry is, however, marked as passing to the "hard" in Canon Slatter's old map of the state of things

in 1626, and according to the Act of Parliament of 1792 the bridge was to be built "at or near the Ferry." Moreover, the Commissioners proposed, after the bridge was made, "to deepen a shallow in this position which had been used as a ford at low water time to the great inconvenience of navigation." So probably both routes were followed. But Jessop's maps remind us of the question, once a burning one and even now scarcely extinguished, as to the ownership of the road to the mill—was it, or is it, public or private, and, if private, how much belongs to whom? It is not a matter to discuss here; but, looking back to the spacious days of Queen Victoria, I recall the scores of times we crossed the meadow on the mill island, and after the compliments of the morning paid to Chambers, the worthy lock-keeper, plunged into the weir pool. It is a glorious bathing place, without sucking undercurrents, and therefore as safe as most weir pools are dangerous—that of Goring, for example.

Much more might be said, but I must only mention an interesting discovery which vividly reminds us of those who crossed our ford or ferry in olden days. At the office of the Thames Conservancy they showed me thirty-four Roman coins which were scooped up while dredging the weir. They date from the time of the Emperor Claudius to that of Marcus Aurelius, A.D. 41 to A.D. 180, a period which corresponds with the most active part of the Roman occupation of Britain. They are poor worn coins, just the pence and half-pence the wayfaring man might have had in his wallet, but why so many were dropped into the river it is hard to say.



IX

DECEMBER 1921

FISHING AND FISHERIES

One of the Emperors had particular fishponds, and in them several fish, that appeared and came when they were called by their particular names. . . . All the further use that I shall make of this, shall be, to advise Anglers to be patient, and forbear swearing, lest they be heard, and catch no fish.—IZAAK WALTON.

ON Monday, May 5, 1801, there was an auction at the "Elephant and Castle" in Pangbourne. Two small pieces of land known as the "free plats" in the common meadow below the river by the Hardwick road, which carried certain fishing rights, were put up for sale,[1] as also were the fishing rights between the "Bridge Eyot" and Hardwick. It is not perfectly clear who had the right to fish from the free plats, nor how much the inhabitants of Whitchurch did, by right, or permission, or custom, fish from the common mead and perhaps trespass in doing so; but the outcome of the sale is clear enough: S. Gardiner bought one free plat, and one thousand five hundred and sixty-two yards of the fishing, and Philip Lybbe Powys the younger bought the other plat and the remaining six

[1] By order of the Commissioners appointed by Act of Parliament for enclosing the parish of Whitchurch in the County of Oxford.—J. M. G.

hundred and twenty yards of the fishing. So that was the end of any public or free fishing from the river bank in this parish; for the fishing rights above the bridge had already passed into the possession of private owners.

In speaking of public or free fishing no reference is intended to the general public. The general public never had any right to fish from our river bank in what may be called historical times. The right to fish belonged to those inhabitants of Whitchurch who enjoyed similar rights on the common—those of grazing, cutting wood, etc., as described in the August number of the magazine (No. V).

In the time of Edward I Whitchurch was well off as regards fishing, for there were in the manor thirty-seven furlongs, that is four and five-eighths miles, whereas Peter de Cowdray, the lord of the "hamlet of Gatehampton," had only half a mile of fishing, and that was "free"; and John de Chausy, the lord of the manor of Mapledurham, had still less—only one-eighth of a mile, also "free." Of the thirty-seven furlongs in Whitchurch twenty-five belonged to the lord of the manor (who, by the way, was a lady, the Countess of Albemarle) and the remaining twelve furlongs were "free." The precise limits are not stated, but we may note that the distance from Basildon to Hardwick House is just four miles, rather less than the thirty-seven furlongs. Portions of the fishing rights have since then often changed hands, but the titles by which some of them are held appear to be still open to controversy. The miller's rights, for example, were once warmly disputed. The ancient mill is stated in Domesday to be worth twenty shillings (a year?), but it is not mentioned in the Hundred Rolls. It was, however,

part of the manor till 1626, when John Whistler, the lord of the manor, left it to a younger son. The dispute arose on the legal question whether a miller's fishing rights in the " mill-tail " are as extensive as his " right to flow," which it is acknowledged reaches to the junction of the mill stream with the main stream.

We will leave the lawyers to decide this knotty point and also how far across the stream the rights of the owner of the banks extend ; " to the thread " or " to the middle thread of the water " they say, whatever that may mean. It is far too complicated for us, and so is the question how far the public has a right to fish from boats in a navigable stream, one or both banks of which are private property. It seems to be quite clear that no such rights exist in non-tidal rivers, but, for all that, the pleasant and time-honoured custom of fishing from punts is not likely to be interfered with.

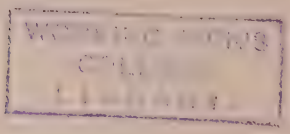
It is an open question whether there are more or fewer fish now in our part of the Thames than there were in Saxon, Norman and Tudor times ; but it is quite certain that in those old days many more fish were taken out of it. We shall not forget about the feeding of pigs with small fry. Old engravings show queer-looking men with broad-brimmed hats and knee-breeches in very old-fashioned boats and punts, perhaps watching a row of cork floats stretching to the shore, or rowing their eelbucks from place to place. In some parts, very long ago, and chiefly in the Lower Thames, great posts were fixed in the banks to support huge nets of one-and-a-half-inch mesh which were left " overthwart the River of Thames " day and night for months together—a nice thing for navigation ! and much more deadly than the man from Reading or the " mild-eyed melancholy " Cockney angler who sits upon his box

all day like patience on a monument—an emblem of faith and hope, and even charity, for he will probably tell you that he mostly gives away his bony captures. Indeed, it takes some seasoning to make a pike or a perch into an appetising dish, and only enthusiasts are keen about the flavour of barbel or chub. The great Thames trout are not likely to come his way, and though eels are undoubtedly good, and some people talk of gudgeon and perhaps some other sorts as being equal to whitebait, it can hardly be said that the fish in the Upper Thames amounts to an article of diet.

It was another matter in the times about which we have been speaking, though the kinds of fish were probably the same, with the possible exceptions of the salmon and the lamprey. The last salmon caught in the Upper Thames was at Maidenhead in 1812, and it is more than likely that this noble fish came much further up before the stream was greatly obstructed by weirs. Fish was more thought of in England before the Reformation, when no stronger meat than fish was allowed on the numerous fast days ; and in pre-Christian days the fisheries were more valuable still, for meat of any kind was not too plentiful. In mediaeval times the monasteries and other ecclesiastical establishments and some private houses had their own fish ponds, where that large but second-rate fish, the carp, was grown for food. It was introduced from Germany or Prussia in 1496 or thereabouts, as we learn from the well-known lines in the *Chronicle* of Sir Richard Baker, who was an Oxfordshire man and lived in the time of Queen Elizabeth and later :

> Hops and Turkies, Carps and Beer
> Came into England all in a year.

Our forefathers were apparently not very particular about what they ate. No doubt they smothered the unappetising morsels with potent herbs and savoury sauces. Izaak Walton, who died in 1683 at the age of ninety-three, takes a page and a half of his delightful book, *The Compleat Angler*, to describe the roasting of a pike. It is to be stuffed with thyme, sweet-marjoram and a little winter-savoury, pickled oysters, anchovies, a pound of butter and a blade of mace, and often basted with claret wine, anchovies, and butter, mixed together ; while, to the sauce produced by the roasting and basting, more butter is to be added, and the juice of three or four oranges. Lastly, two cloves of garlic may be put into the stuffing or rubbed upon the dish into which you let the pike fall. " This dish of meat," he says, " is too good for any but Anglers or very honest men ; and I trust you will prove both and therefore I have trusted you with the secret." Such cooking must have thoroughly disguised any muddy flavour of the pike and have cost a pretty penny into the bargain. But I was thinking of more primitive times and cruder cooking when our fathers put their food into their mouths with their fingers, as they continued to do until the more cleanly custom of using a fork was introduced into this country from Italy in the time of James I.



JANUARY 1922

THE PARISH CHURCH

1.—In Norman Times

'Tis to this Church I call thee, and that place
Where slept our fathers when they'd run their race:
We too shall rest, and then our children keep
Their road in life, and then, forgotten sleep;
Meanwhile the building slowly falls away,
And, like the builders, will in time decay.

CRABBE.

ROUGHLY speaking, the Parish Church is modern; that is, it was almost entirely rebuilt in 1858. But it will not do, on that account, to look upon it as uninteresting, for it contains several relics of the past which well repay examination. They will help us to picture to ourselves some very definite stages in its history.

Entering the churchyard from the Walliscote drive and scarcely glancing at the rather unattractive north porch, let us pass through the narrow archway that leads behind the church and look at the stones built into the corners of the flint wall that forms the west front. They are evidently of different ages. Some are like those which were used in the rebuilding of the church and are of a yellowish colour; others are clearly

blocks that belonged to an older structure. They are of a coarser texture, much greyer, more weather-worn and very roughly hewn. It is more than possible that they came from the celebrated quarries at Headington near Oxford, which supplied the stone for many of the Oxford colleges. This quarry is known to have been worked in Norman and perhaps even in Anglo-Saxon times. The river would give comparatively easy access to it.

Proceeding now to the south side, and passing by, for the moment, the porch and the vestry, let us examine the first window in the wall of the chancel. Some of the stones of which it is formed, but not all, are clearly ancient. As a matter of fact, they are not stones at all, but masses of chalk, called "clunch," and they are now crumbling away very fast. It is not unreasonable to think that this is one of the old windows put back into the new building as a remembrance. But, if so, the rebuilders did not copy the tracery elsewhere. From its shape we may be sure that it did not belong to the Norman church, the remains of which will next claim our attention. It was common enough, as taste in architecture changed, to take out old windows and to replace them by those most in fashion at the time. This one, whatever may be said about the tracery, probably belongs to the fourteenth century.

If we now go back to the south porch and step inside it, we shall see facing us almost all that remains of the first church at Whitchurch which we know anything about, namely the Norman church. It is a massive, rounded stone arch, severely plain, without mouldings or ornament, supported by two almost equally plain shafts or pillars on either side. Observe the capitals; they are not symmetrical on the two sides; on one side

THE NORMAN DOORWAY

both show a simple leaf pattern, on the other they are just cubes with the lower corners rounded off. The bases of the columns are as plain as they can be. The single stones of which the pillars consist have been "surbedded," that is, set edgewise, contrary to the position they had in the quarry. They look as if they are weather-worn, which suggests that there was no porch when the Norman church was built. We say Norman with confidence, because the shape of the arch and the pillars belongs to that period and that period only. As Norman architecture was introduced about the time of the Conquest and was given up in the reign of Henry II, we may be sure that the Norman church was built not earlier than 1066, and not later than 1189. Whether this replaced a still older Anglo-Saxon church we do not know. "Witecerce," the name of the village as it is spelt in Domesday Book, is suggestive. If such a church ever existed it would most likely have been built of wood.

The square doorway is quite out of keeping with the round arch. It belongs to the same period as the porch, which is much later, so we must exercise our imagination as to whether there was originally a great oak door with a rounded top filling the whole space, or whether it was a square door, the upper part of the arch being filled in with masonry. In the latter case it is just possible that the strange head in stone with its melancholy mouth and weird, uplifted gaze, now fixed in the wall above the arch, may have occupied the space between the door and the arch, as Canon Slatter suggested [1]; but it is more likely that it came from some other part of the old church, having served perhaps as the support for an arch in the interior, or of a water-gutter outside.

[1] In his *History of the Parish of Whitchurch*, 1895.

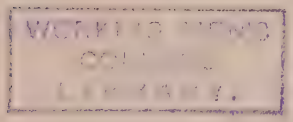
It is difficult to realize that through this very archway many generations of the inhabitants of Whitchurch passed into the church in Norman times, on Sundays and Holy Days; and pretty regularly, too, for non-attendance made them liable to a fine. Let us in fancy join the congregation and try to picture to ourselves what they saw. It would be useless to listen to their conversation, for in the earliest times they would be talking Anglo-Saxon, which we could not understand, and later a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and French, which would be equally unintelligible. But it is easy to form an idea of what they saw. They saw a plain nave lighted by rather squat windows with rounded tops like the doorway. The roof of the nave was possibly flat, but more likely it was an open one showing the actual frame timbers. On the plaster walls there were probably fresco pictures of scriptural or other appropriate scenes. Figures of saints stood round the walls, perhaps with candles burning before them. There were no pews or seats, but possibly some very rough stools or chairs upon the stone or tiled floor.

Looking eastward they saw the slightly raised chancel separated from the nave by a great rounded arch. The chancel walls may also have been decorated with fresco paintings, which, like those of the nave, would be mostly of a brick-red, blue, or yellow colour.

When our forefathers were all assembled they heard the mass celebrated by the priest in the Latin language, which few, if any of them, could understand. The language of the people was only used when a sermon was preached, and that apparently did not take place with great regularity. The more solemn moments of the mass were marked by the ringing of a bell in the church, and, in mediaeval days, outside as well, so as

to inform the people of what was being done. At High Mass, celebrated with greater ceremony, the priest, assisted by an attendant, offered sweet-smelling incense at certain points in the service to symbolize the prayers and praises of the people.

This, in the briefest outline, describes the Norman church soon after it was built. Those who wish to see with their own eyes what such a church looked like, allowing for many changes which have been introduced between then and now, should make a pilgrimage to Checkendon, or better still to Crowmarsh. In the former some restored wall-paintings are to be seen. There are similar unrestored frescoes on the walls of North Stoke church, but it is of course impossible to be quite sure of the date of any of these adornments. They may have been added long after the church was built.



THE PARISH CHURCH

2.—Some Old Brasses

Old Yew, which graspest at the stones,
That name the under-lying dead,
Thy fibres net the dreamless head,
Thy roots are wrapped about the bones.

The seasons bring the flower again,
And bring the firstling to the flock;
And in the dusk of thee, the clock
Beats out the little lives of men.

Tennyson.

BEFORE describing the south porch something should be said about two old brasses, each of which tells an interesting tale of the time at or about which the porch was built.

The first, now fixed to the wall at the north side of the chancel arch, represents a knight in close-fitting armour, and a lady in flowing robes by his side. The inscription, half of which is unfortunately lost, tells us that the knight was Thomas Walysch; and the lady was his wife. His face is shaven except for a moustache. His armour is characteristic of the time at which he lived—the first half of the fifteenth century—when

chain armour was almost completely superseded by plate armour. This change came about gradually, and corresponded in point of time with the increasing employment of guns and cannon and gunpowder, which had been first used in war about a hundred years previously. We need not think of Sir Thomas strolling about the village in this cumbrous attire, but we may picture him riding forth to some state function, or perhaps to take his part in the Wars of the Roses or the Battle of Agincourt, on a veritable charger of stout cart-horse breed, with his sword and dagger by his side and his lance at rest. Whether or not he really was a distinguished warrior we cannot be sure, but he undoubtedly moved in high society, and presumably was a judge of wines, for the inscription tells us that he was "Trayer" (that is "treyour," or in modern English, trier) of wines for John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and for three kings in succession, Henry IV, V, and VI. This office, which one may guess dates back to the time when poison might be suspected in the cup, was probably more or less of a sinecure, for it seems to have been abolished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Thomas Walysch had the Manor of Whitchurch bestowed upon him by Henry V, and, as he was buried in the church, it seems likely that he lived here; but there is no actual proof that he did so, and we do not know where his manor-house may have been. It is tempting to connect his name with Walliscote House, but this is hardly justifiable. At all events, the present house is of much later date. It was built, Canon Slatter assures us, but I do not know on what evidence, by John Wallis, a rather wealthy and extraordinarily learned Oxford Professor of Geometry, who lived in the time of Cromwell, Charles II, and James II. His descendants

certainly resided here. But this belongs to a later chapter of the village history.

The other old brass is still more worth studying, but you must take a candle or an electric torch and go down on your knees to see it well. It is fixed to a stone slab on the floor of the chancel on the north side of the altar.

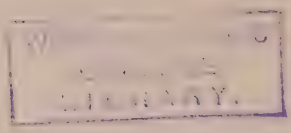
An eccentric old Oxford scholar named Anthony à Wood (1632–95), who was a contemporary of John Wallis, describes it thus in a manuscript still preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford: "On an aultar monument against the wall in the Chancell lies the statue of a Priest in brasse with his Stole and Vestment, a labell at his mouth with the words, 'Misericordias domini in æternum cantabo,'" which are the first words of the 89th Psalm, "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever."

The priest's face and his vestments and the chalice with the "glorified host" are beautifully engraved, and below is a long Latin inscription which those who are able to do so may puzzle out. Briefly it states that Master Roger Gery lies here who was at one time Vicar of this church; that in 1455, at his own labour and expense, he brought about the consolidation and perpetual union of the Rectory and Vicarage of this church, and that he died on the — day of the — month, fourteen hundred and —. He evidently had the brass engraved during his lifetime, and, when he resigned the rectorship in 1483, left the date of his death to be filled in by his successors: a pious duty which they failed to perform. Probably he died and was buried somewhere else, and, if so, it is rather sad to reflect that the first two words of his epitaph, "hic jacet" (here lieth) are not true.

The explanation of the epitaph is as follows: Roger Gery was first vicar and then, after seven years' absence, returned as rector in 1462. It was before this that he brought about the consolidation which is spoken of on his tomb. This technical word "consolidation" introduces rather a dry, but not altogether uninteresting subject. It means the merging of the two offices when there were both a vicar and a rector in the same parish. Such was the case here up to the time of Roger Gery; which explains what used to seem rather puzzling, that a small white house half-way up the village street was formerly called "The Old Vicarage." It is now reduced to the condition of a picturesque ruin and absorbed into the grounds of "The Mount." Its name indeed, is only remembered by a few of us older inhabitants, and before long this old brass will be the only record that there ever was a vicar of Whitchurch. Now although, in England, a rector was, properly speaking, a priest having a cure of souls, this was by no means always the case; for in the Middle Ages many rectories were "appropriated to," that is, they were held by, ecclesiastical bodies such as monasteries, abbeys, etc., not necessarily even English. These ecclesiastical bodies took what were known as the "great tithes" and appointed a vicar to do the work, and though he had to be a priest he only received the often miserable remuneration of the "small tithes." Such was the case, for example, at Goring, which parish was "appropriated" to the Priory of Austin Nuns at Goring, and so there is a vicar, not a rector, of Goring to this day. But even in parishes where no such appropriation had taken place, it was not necessary for the rector to be in priest's orders. He might be a deacon or subdeacon or even a layman and perhaps a foreigner. In such

cases he was obliged to appoint a vicar who was a priest and really had the cure of souls. The rector then might be non-resident and hold more than one benefice, but for all that it was he who received the " great tithes." Such was the unsatisfactory state of things in Whitchurch till good Roger Gery, by consolidating the two offices, did away with the possibility of any part of the tithes of this parish going to an absentee rector.

It will be understood that we are speaking of long ago and not attempting to discuss what has become of tithes in modern times.



THE FOLIATED CROSS

XII

MARCH 1922

THE PARISH CHURCH

3.—The South Porch

> The hand that rounded Peter's dome,
> And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,
> Wrought in a sad sincerity:
> Himself from God he could not free;
> He builded better than he knew;—
> The conscious stone to beauty grew.
>
> Emerson.

IT is possible that Thomas Walysch, the knight, may have lived long enough to pass the time of day with Master Roger Gery, the vicar; and it is also possible that they may have seen the south porch; but I expect this was built after the death even of Roger. It is said to be of the fifteenth century, but cannot have been built much, if at all, before the year 1500; perhaps in the reign of Henry VII or Henry VIII, that is, not long, if at all, before the time of the Reformation.

Attention should be paid to the square windows, the square head to the entrance, and to the stiff little angels on each side of it, clasping shields. Passing under the flat angular arch we observe another arch of the same shape above the door into the church, and ornaments like those on the outside between this arch and the

square architrave (in the space known to architects as the spandrils). These are all quite out of keeping with the old Norman arch; but the mason was perhaps thinking of it and the difference between the columns on the two sides (noticed in No. X) when he cut his two little roses not exactly of the same pattern; but he may only have been following what was certainly the fashion of the day.

The wooden framework of the roof is believed to be of the same age as the porch itself. Canon Slatter, writing in 1895, says that the porch "had until lately a wooden ceiling, but this being so decayed as to need complete removal, it was taken entirely away." The ceiling it may be supposed was put in when the porch was built. The rafters, now mellowed with age, would have been considered ugly by the pious builders, and they probably thought nothing of hiding the poor agonized head above the door, which accordingly was confined in darkness for more than three hundred years.

But, if this was hidden away, a much more interesting stone tablet was fixed outside the porch just above the entrance. The weather-worn carving on the tablet represents the Crucifixion, and it has this peculiarity, that the cross bears twelve large leaves. It has been suggested that this refers to the Tree of Life spoken of in Revelation xxii. 2, which, however, it will be remembered had twelve manner of fruits, leaves being only mentioned casually.

It was common in early days to make the cross leafy, or "foliated," but it is unlikely that the number of leaves was always twelve, for they sometimes grew from the horizontal part of the cross only.

There is a very old legend which gives the real

explanation of the leafy cross. It will be found in a long Northumbrian poem on the history of the world, written by a priest or monk in the fourteenth century. Very few copies exist. I have seen and handled one of them, at Oxford, which belonged to Archbishop Laud. The story is that when Adam was nine hundred and thirty years old he longed to die, so he sent Seth to Paradise to ask how soon he might depart, and to beg for the " oil of mercy " which had been promised him. The angel " Cherubim " said this would be sent much later, but he took three " pippins " from the Tree of Knowledge and told him to place them under the root of Adam's tongue when he was buried. From these pippins grew three wands of " cedre, cipresse and pine." They survived the flood and were found by Moses in the desert. With them he made bitter waters sweet, and when he died they were planted by his grave. David was told in a dream where to find them. By this time they all three were springing from one trunk, which he took to Jerusalem, where it grew into a large tree. Solomon cut it down when building the temple, but it proved to be too short for the required balk of timber. It was accordingly placed as a relic in the temple and remained there and in other parts of the holy city till it was used at last by the Jews to make the " true cross " ; and from midday to " compline " (the last prayer at night, say 7 p.m.) on the day of the Crucifixion the cross " full strangely flourished with leaf and bark." But the Jews who saw it, though they thought it very wonderful,

> Neither they gave man, nor they took
> Ensample good thereby ;
> But on the morn of that grening
> The tree as erst was dry

The legend, it will be observed, refers to the Tree of Knowledge, not to the Tree of Life which grew so near it in the Garden of Eden. No doubt the man who designed the tablet knew the old story by heart, but probably when he made the number of the leaves twelve he was thinking also of the twelve fruits on the Tree of Life, and the twelve months, and perhaps the twelve apostles as well.

But if the "pious builders," as we naturally call them, for they were mostly priests and monks, were satisfied to accept these old legends, the common sense of the people began to make them uneasy about the meaning of the second Commandment. Accordingly, within fifty years of the building of the porch, they ceased to burn candles before the images of the saints, and gradually removed them altogether, and washed off or washed over the frescoes on the walls. And there were other reforms. They would no longer put up with a priest who was a foreigner, or in some places even an Irishman, or one who could not speak good English. It was ordained also that at High Mass the Epistle and the Gospel were to be read in English. The people were taught the "Our Father" and the creeds in their native tongue, and an English Bible (Coverdale's) was introduced into the churches and chained to prevent its being taken away, to which there was often added the "Paraphrase" of Erasmus to explain difficulties. You may see such a "Paraphrase" chained in Blewbury church to-day.

In one way, however, it was rather a sad time, for most of the church plate disappeared under very unsatisfactory circumstances.

Hardly anything is known about structural alterations in our church between 1500 and 1858. No doubt old

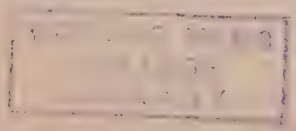
windows were replaced by new ones, and decayed parts were rebuilt. The chancel (it was the common fate of chancels) probably fell into disrepair, which may account for the hideous brick east end shown in the only engraving of the church which is available.

Reference must, however, be made to two small chapels which were thrown out from the north side of the nave, we know not when, and which, according to Canon Slatter, "of late years had been claimed by the Hardwick Manor."[1] He suggested that one was the private chapel of the tenant of the small manor in Berkshire known as Hide Hall. With regard to this, I would begin by saying that the question of private chapels or "chantries" is not one to discuss here, and then add the following record, of which those who are more learned in such matters than I am may make what they can. The Roll of Grosseteste, the mighty Bishop of Lincoln, mentions the establishment of such a chapel "at Hide in Whitchurch" in the year 1244. The privilege was to be permanent and the chapel was to be endowed, but it might not possess either bell or font; the chaplain was to be nominated by the patron, to be presented to the Bishop, and to be called the Rector of the Chapel. I think myself that this chapel was at Hide Hall, which was replaced by Purley Hall in 1720, when the last of the Hydes or Hides disappeared from the scene.

Is it likely that there were ever two rectors in Whitchurch, one of whom was the private chaplain of the chantry?

However that may be, the chapels were used in modern days, up to 1858, for the accommodation of the school-children.

[1] These chapels were pulled down in 1858 when the north aisle was built.—J. M. G.



XIII

APRIL 1922

THE PARISH CHURCH

4.—Monuments and Gravestones

In days of yore (that now we call)
When James the First was King,
The courtly knight from yonder hall
His train did hither bring;
All seated round in order due,
With broider'd suit and buckled shoe.

Jane Taylor.

THERE is little or nothing left in most of our old churches to remind us of the amount of bright colour with which their interiors were at one time decorated—it would perhaps be rash to say adorned. I am not referring to the frescoes on the walls, but to the brilliant decoration of stone and woodwork and the elaborate colouring of tombs which were common in the time of the Plantagenets and their successors. Most of us when we look at the sleeping figures of priests and bishops, knights and ladies, rather pride ourselves, perhaps, upon the sober tastes which we have inherited from our forefathers, forgetting, if we ever knew, that most, if not all, of these monuments, including the masterpieces of the "Alabaster men," were covered with jesso and paint, and even gold or precious stones

if the survivors were rich enough to afford it. Here and there traces of this ornamentation remain. There are, for example, two beautiful coloured tombs at Ewelme; but in most churches the colour has been washed over, or washed off, leaving the bare stone or marble exposed to the mutilations of earnest but misguided people in the time of Cromwell, and to the mischief which is still being done by the hand of the vulgar name-carver.

These tombs, which were first made of English stone, or marble, and afterwards of Derbyshire alabaster and materials from foreign lands, were no doubt gorgeous objects; and the interior of Westminster Abbey or any of our old cathedrals must have shown a wonderful glow of colour, softened, of course, by the "dim religious light" that streamed through their stained glass windows.

It is not suggested that our Parish Church ever had much bright colouring. We know nothing about the two little chapels. They may have been decorated in some way; but the probability is that after the figures of the saints were removed and the Puritans had obtained the upper hand, the whole interior of the church was dingy enough.

We have, however, one excellent coloured monument, now unfortunately placed in the worst possible position for examination. It is typical of a class of monument that came into fashion before the end of the sixteenth century and was a favourite one throughout the whole of the Stuart period. They include life-like representations of the people they commemorate, and these are almost the only coloured effigies that are to be seen nowadays. It is doubtful whether the figures on the most ancient tombs were really intended to be portraits

at all; but it is impossible to doubt about Richard Lybbe and his wife Joanna as we see them in their monument on the south wall of the chancel. They appear as it were in the flesh—he clad in the armour of Queen Elizabeth's time, she in widow's weeds—kneeling opposite one another at a small desk, with clasped hands,

> As though they did intend
> For past omissions to atone,
> By saying endless prayers in stone.

One can almost imagine them rising from their devotions and riding off—the wife behind her husband on a pillion—to their mansion at Hardwick where their two sons, whose names are printed in fine large letters, and their eight daughters, for whom a very modest type was thought sufficient, were waiting for them. In similar monuments the children are often to be seen kneeling in two rows, the boys behind the father and the girls behind the mother. There is an example of this at Checkendon, but the children are below, not behind, their parents.

The Lybbe monument is carved in clunch (chalk), and, like the beautiful tablet to the next Richard Lybbe on the north wall of the nave, is Italian in style, reminding us that Henry VII introduced Italian sculptors into England for the purpose of making tombs, and that the influence of these artists lasted through several subsequent reigns.

Richard Lybbe the elder was "sewar" or server to Queen Mary, the last of our sovereigns to follow the unreformed practices of Rome; that is, he was a court official who was supposed to arrange the dishes and taste them. By the time he died, in 1599, there had

been at least two Protestant rectors here. Those who wish to see what they looked like should examine a small brass tablet in memory of Peter Winder "curate," who died in 1610. It is fixed just above the brass of Thomas Walysch. He seems to be wearing the ordinary out-of-door dress of the clergy of the day—"gowns with standing collars and sleeves straight at the hands or wide sleeves." He has a very large starched ruff round his neck.

Richard Lybbe the younger lived at Hardwick during the reigns of James I and Charles I and the stormy times of the Revolution. He married into the influential Berkshire family of Blagrave, one of whom signed the death warrant of Charles I, and had much to do with turning out of their parishes clergymen who were objectionable in the eyes of the Commonwealth. He grew rich and was prosperous till the Restoration, when he had to leave England hurriedly and died abroad. Other Blagraves were men of science and good citizens of Reading, their name being memorialized in Blagrave Street. Richard and Anne Lybbe must often have come to church with anxious minds, for their sympathies (Richard's at all events) seem to have been with the Royalists, and so they had hard work to keep an even keel in those tempestuous days and much of their money and plate went first to one side and then to the other. They saw the introduction of the church service more or less in its present form; but how exactly it was conducted during Henry Whistler's long incumbency of fifty-six years (1616–72) it would be hard to say, for his leaning was towards the Parliamentarians with a special affection for Cromwell. You may gather from Sir Walter Scott's novel *Woodstock* what irregularities were practised in parish churches in those days.

This Henry Whistler, the parson, was the son of John Whistler, the lord of the manor. The Whistlers first appeared on the scene in 1591 when Ralph Whistler bought Fowlscourt, or Fullescourt, now an outlying farm of South Moreton near Didcot. He afterwards acquired Gatehampton and it was his son John who bought the Manor of Whitchurch in 1605, which the family continued to hold for over one hundred and seventy years; but though so closely connected with Whitchurch they mostly lived at Goring. It is not, however, the holding of sundry manors in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Ireland that has made the name of Whistler immortal, but the work of an eccentric genius of their race though American by birth. This was James McNeill Whistler, one of the most original artists of last century, whose paintings and etchings, once the scorn of the critics, are now eagerly sought after and fetch very high prices.

As you walk to your seats in the church you are perhaps unaware that you are stepping over the slate and marble gravestones of many a Whistler, fitted in like a puzzle amongst those of Lybbes and other worthies and often sadly mutilated to make room for their neighbours. There are a Ralph, a Thomas, a Henry, an Antony and at least three Johns with the last of whom this line of the family became extinct in 1780. The records of their doings and of their virtues are now hidden by matting and it is worth while on a bright day to have it rolled back and ponder over the time when they were the most important people in this neighbourhood.

WORKING MEN'S
LIBRARY.

XIV

MAY 1922

THE CHURCHYARD

I like that ancient Saxon phrase, which calls
The burial-ground God's-Acre! It is just;
It consecrates each grave within its walls,
And breathes a benison o'er the sleeping dust.
LONGFELLOW.

WE are apt to think, if we think about it at all, that churches were always surrounded by burial grounds; that, for example, when the tiny little white church was built by the Saxons on the river's bank a churchyard was laid out round it just as was done when St. John's, or any other modern church, was built. But this is by no means certain. Churchyards probably did not exist at all before A.D. 750. The custom of burying in churchyards followed that of burying inside the churches, and the underlying idea of both was in some way connected with the vexed question of the efficacy of prayers for the dead. In older days the bodies, or the ashes after cremation, were laid in cemeteries (that is "sleeping places") outside villages and towns. Thus outside Rome and other cities there were long roads called "Sacred Ways", which were literally streets of tombs in which the ashes of the dead were placed. In the early Christian days (A.D. 200 to 400) some of the

outskirts of Rome were riddled with vast networks of underground passages, sometimes one below the other, three deep. These are the catacombs in which many thousands of Christians were buried. They are so intricate that anyone who ventured into them now without a guide might never get out again.

When the railway was taken up the Lambourn valley a shallow cutting opened up a Saxon cemetery near Great Shefford. I had the opportunity of seeing the skeletons and the ornaments buried with them. From these it appears that the cemetery dates from the early part of the sixth century and probably before the introduction of Christianity into England, for the bodies were not placed with the feet to the east, as was the custom even in very early Christian times. This cemetery, it must be noted, is about half way between the ancient churches of Great Shefford and East Shefford, but attached to neither. Very likely there is a Saxon cemetery here if we could find it. Such discoveries are constantly being made. For example, at Basildon a curious burial has lately been found whilst quarrying for chalk, but this is apparently Roman.

When our fathers began to bury in churches and churchyards the limited accommodation, especially in towns, led in time to great difficulties and some scandals. In London it was dreadful. Great heaps of coffins accumulated in the crypts or cellars under some of the churches; and in the churchyards it was not much better. This led to pollution of the wells and other dangers to health. It also gave the grave-diggers the opportunity of carrying on a disgraceful trade by stealing the coffin-plates. In the time of the plague great pits were dug, into which the bodies were thrown anyhow. Every now and then one of these pits is opened up in

the course of excavations for building purposes, or road making. As far as London is concerned, burial in churches and churchyards practically came to an end in 1855, and now all towns, even small ones, have had to return to the custom of their ancestors and construct their cemeteries far away from their places of worship.

But it is time to return to our village and investigate our own churchyard. All churchyards are " the parsons' freeholds " but, as they are also subject to a right of way, we may enter and see if it will yield us any points of interest. There is scarcely anything which commemorates the ancient history of the parish. If there were ever any of the old wooden records of its humbler worthies they have all disappeared. Probably such " frail memorials " once gave short histories of some of those who sleep beneath the nameless mounds, which are rather sad to look upon. These mounds are like those at Stoke Poges, which are thus described by Gray in his *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard :*

> Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
> Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
> Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
> The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

Our only elm came tumbling down lately and smashed the wall of the Rectory garden. As to the yew, it is a well-grown tree of a respectable age. The trunk measures seven feet eight inches in girth at four and a half feet from the ground. Yews grow fast for about a hundred years and then very slowly. Our tree is probably only a hundred or a hundred and fifty years old. Near Copyhold Farm, on the parish boundary, there is a really venerable yew. The trunk, formed of several stems combined, measures nineteen

and a half feet at one and a half foot from the ground. It is probably eight hundred years old, perhaps a thousand. Just think of your Saxon ancestors cutting their bows from it! And what shall we say of the Aldworth yew [in Berkshire] that measures over twenty-seven feet six inches at five feet from the ground and has only increased about six inches since 1760, when George III came to the throne?

The inscriptions on the flat gravestones can seldom be made out, partly because many of them are made of soft perishable Oxfordshire stone, but chiefly no doubt because so many people have walked over them, perhaps at a time when the churchyard was the village playground.

Few, if any, of the upright stones date back further than 1700 and I can find no quaint epitaphs or verses to enliven this rather sombre subject. On many of the older ones we see with interest names which are familiar to us in Whitchurch to-day.

The clearly cut gravestones and the more imposing monuments of modern days require no comment, as the inscriptions are plain for all to read. We must notice, however, in passing, that of William Slatter, Vicar of Bramber, because it reminds us of his brother, Canon Slatter, who is buried in St. John's churchyard, and who was rector here for nineteen years (1880–99). I have already owned my indebtedness to his *History of the Parish of Whitchurch*, which is crammed full of information. Not far off is the grave of his immediate predecessor, Edward Moore, whose incumbency of forty years began as long ago as 1840. Only a few of our oldest neighbours were contemporaries of his.

On the other side of the path has been placed a comparatively modern stone in memory of an older clergyman, the inscription being prettily marked out by a

growth of bright green moss in the deeply cut letters. It tells the story, or, like most epitaphs, only a part of the story, of Luc (or Luke) de Beaulieu a very clever Frenchman who was Rector here for thirty-eight years (1685–1723). He was a Huguenot—that is, a French Protestant—who fled to this country to escape persecution and soon became widely known on account of his learning and his devotional writings. One would like only to think of him as safely moored in this haven of rest after the storms he had encountered during the first forty years of his life. But there is another side to the picture. He obtained the living through the influence of the wicked Judge Jeffreys, to whom he acted as chaplain, and by whose help he was also made first a Prebendary of St. Paul's and afterwards a Prebendary of Gloucester. It is not so pleasant to think of our Rector as possibly accompanying his infamous patron on "the bloody assize," in which over three hundred suspected rebels were executed after mere mock trials in the west of England in the course of a month; but I can obtain no evidence that he had to perform this hateful task. The assize began at Winchester and ended at Bristol, and his parishioners must surely have heard all about it. However, de Beaulieu had many peaceful years here after Jeffreys' death in prison which followed soon after the flight of his master, King James II. For part of this time he was chaplain to a much more respectable person, the energetic John Fell, Bishop of Oxford, whose hard fate it is to be remembered not so much for his good deeds as because he was the subject of the well-known rhyme:

I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell,
But this I do know very well,
I do not like you, Dr. Fell.

Perhaps he was too much on the look-out for slackness in other people.

Luke de Beaulieu's wife Priscilla and his clergyman son are buried with him.

One other tomb at least must not pass unnoticed. It bears the name of several members of the Forbes family. Sir John Forbes, the physician, spent the last two years of his life (1859–61) in Whitchurch with his son, Alexander Clarke Forbes, who was known to some of us, and some of whose descendants are our fellow parishioners. The large house abutting on the village street vanished under the skilful hand of Mr. Pearson to reappear in more artistic form further back. Sir John's career was typically that of a hardy Scotsman: the village school at Castlebrae in Banffshire (with Sir James Clark as schoolfellow), nine years in the Navy, five at Penzance, eighteen in busy and lucrative practice at Chichester, during which he found time to write medical books and join in the work of London Medical Societies, and finally absorbed in the whirlpool of the great city where he still had nineteen active years before him. No wonder that besides his medical works and illustrated accounts of foreign travels he left another booklet the mere title of which is worthy of consideration: *Of Happiness in its Relation to Work and Knowledge.*

WORKING MEN'S
COLLEGE
LIBRARY.

XV

JUNE 1922

COACHES

When high hot zuns da strik right down,
An' burn our zweaty fiazen brown,
An' zunny hangèns that be nigh
Be back'd by hills so blue's the sky ;
Then while the bells da sweetly cheem
Upon the champèn high-neck'd team
How lively, wi' a friend, da seem
The white road up athirt the hill.

BARNES.

THREE HUNDRED years ago if anyone of whatever sex or station wanted to go from Whitchurch to London, he or she would have had to ride on horseback as best they might ; for the only alternative would have been a wagon without springs hauled by a long team of horses over a road little better than a broad ditch casually strewed with stones.

English roads were execrable even as late as 1770, which is strange considering what solid roads the Romans made, not of course fit for pneumatic tyres, but still very fine roads. The Anglo-Saxons soon forgot, if they ever learned, what the Romans had taught, and the great roads fell into utter disrepair. Before 1700, however, i.e. more than two hundred years ago, there were " stage coaches " on three of the principal roads

in the kingdom (to York, Chester and Exeter); but they were poor things at the best. On some routes, at all events, they only ran in the summer, and even then passengers had often to walk long distances at the worst places. In 1673 the journey from London to Exeter took eight days, and required forty horses in all, stabled at the various post stages. Much later, in the eighteenth century, it still took five days, and this is a sample of the state of things throughout the country. It needed, moreover, some courage to undertake a journey when, besides the perils of breakdowns, mud and snow, you ran a fair chance of losing your way or being robbed by highwaymen.

From such ancient history there emerges one interesting fact for us, namely, that in 1784 the Bath "stage coach" left London on Monday and did not reach its destination till Wednesday. Such sluggishness much annoyed a certain John Palmer, a man of enterprise and substance, who owned a theatre at Bath and often wanted to get a "star" actor from London for his plays. The tediousness of the journey made this almost impossible, so he took up the road question in addition to his other activities, and, after much opposition, persuaded the Government of the day to adopt his suggestions; and that was the beginning of "Mail Coaches" and high-class roads. The first "Mail Coach" in accordance with Mr. Palmer's plan, left London at 8 a.m. on August 8, 1784, and reached Bristol at 11 p.m. the same night: a distance of one hundred and twenty miles, i.e. eight miles an hour including stoppages—which was not bad.

It so happened that the next great improvement was also made on the Bristol roads. This was the work of that clever Scotsman, John Macadam, after whom the "macadamized" road is named, and who was

appointed Surveyor-General of the Bristol roads in 1815. Very little more was done in the way of road improvement till the introduction of " tarmac " for the benefit of motorists. The mac of tarmac is of course the " Mac " in " Macadam."

Thus it is only about a hundred years since the Bath road had a really first-rate surface, over which really first-rate mail coaches, painted chocolate-red like the Royal carriages and motors of to-day, with coachmen and guard in scarlet coats and white or black beaver hats, and four fine horses, went spanking along daily through Aldermaston and Theale ; but too far off for our fathers to hear the merry blasts of their horns, or, I expect, to be picked up or let down at the end of the Tidmarsh road. Meanwhile the old and inferior but much more gaily coloured (yellow and blue, scarlet and so on) stage-coaches, post-coaches and accommodation coaches continued to follow the less good roads, besides supplementing the small accommodation afforded by the mail coaches on the main road. You can judge how far and how fast England has changed, for better or worse, in the last century, by thinking of the swarms of people who crowd the trains to-day and the mere driblet, who, on urgent business bent, could find places in the coaches that plied between Reading and London in 1820.

According to Patterson's *Road Book* (seventeenth edition, 1824) the so-called " direct road " through Pangbourne went through East Ilsley, then the greatest sheep fair in England, to Lambourn. This road apparently went all round by Harwell, the direct road through Compton being unfit for carriages. It was only by means of what were known as " cross roads " that one could reach Wallingford or Wantage or Abingdon or

Oxford. From the same book we gather that at Pangbourne a single inn, "The Elephant and Castle," supplied post horses, and that two "cross-road routes" passed through Pangbourne, one from Oxford to Chichester and the other from Reading to Aylesbury; but Paterson, or rather Mogg, the editor, does not say that any regular line of coaches ran along these routes.

Now listen to his glowing description of Whitchurch: "Across the Thames at Whitchurch, R. Pigou, Esq.; Rev. Hugh Moises; Walliscote, Sir John Simeon, Bart.; and Coombe Lodge, S. Gardiner, Esq. This gentleman has the merit of entirely creating the home scenery round his mansion: the spot is nearly level, and was somewhat subject to encroachments from the Thames. All that art could accomplish has been done here, and the embowering plantations, rising in thriving luxuriance round the mansion, begin to vie with the rich spread of scenery by which they are surrounded. The delightful and far-famed Thames confers a tranquil sweetness on the scene, presenting here the appearance of a lake, on the pellucid bosom of which the rich foliage from the Berkshire side of the water is reflected with considerable effect, thereby increasing the beauties of the charming scenery over which the eye ranges till it is lost in unlimited distance."

Squire Gardiner would have consulted his *Reading Mercury* and found some such notice as this which I have slightly shortened: "Newbury 6 a.m., Reading 8.30 a.m.—Angel Inn. Accommodation Post Coach, carrying 4 inside only, every morning, Sundays excepted, via Wokingham and Staines to the Saracen's Head, Friday Street [in London]. Return Saracen's Head 11 a.m. Gloucester Coffee House 12. Performed by the Public's most obedient and very humble servants

Robert Gilder Brown & Co." No doubt the squire would have secured his place beforehand and driven in to Reading to catch this or one of the other coaches, which would have landed him in London certainly not less than five or six hours after leaving home; and with not much time left for business in town on that day!

As to Rev. Hugh Moises and most of his parishioners, if they could not get a lift to Reading, they would apparently have had to trust to the off chance of a seat in "The Royal Dart Post Coach" which ran daily to Reading from Oxford through Abingdon, Dorchester and Wallingford.

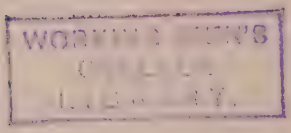
There was strong opposition at first to stage and mail coaches. It was like the usual outcry against new labour-saving devices, which, indeed, has this excuse, but not justification, that they usually lead to some temporary unemployment. Such was the hard case of the hand-loom weavers and cotton-spinners about 1810; and so it was during the agricultural riots of 1830 when the labourers in many counties, Oxfordshire and Berkshire amongst others, smashed great numbers of threshing machines. We read of such tumults at Aston Tirrold, Benson and Newbury, and can hardly wonder at it, seeing that a threshing-barn was looked upon as a little freehold in those days, and a thresher could earn 15s. to 20s. a week up to May with his flail, though agricultural wages at the time were shockingly low.

But what could possibly be the objections to coaches? One was that travellers by coach would become idle and effeminate, and so would be knocked up by a few miles in the saddle. Another that coaches would interfere with, if not destroy, the trade of the watermen.

John Taylor, " the water poet," was much upset. Writing in 1622 he says :

> Carroches, coaches, jades, and Flanders mares,
> Do rob us of our shares, our wares, our fares ;
> Against the ground we stand and knock our heels,
> Whilst all our profit runs away on wheels.

But when mail coaches were flying all over the country these complaints were forgotten and people wondered how they had ever managed without them. Moreover they gave employment to vast numbers of men, who, in their turn, like the watermen, soon thought they had acquired a vested interest in their trade. But they did not have a very long innings, not more than thirty or forty years. Hugh Moises had scarcely been gathered to his fathers before the first railway (from Stockton to Darlington) was authorized by Parliament, and before long there began to be rumours that the " iron horse " would invade this remote and peaceful valley. Great was the consternation of coachmen and conductors and ostlers and jolly post-boys, to say nothing of the portly landlords of the posting inns and the landed proprietors in their secluded parks.



XVI

JULY 1922

RAILWAYS

On ! on with a jump,
And a bump,
And a roll,
Hies the fire-fiend to his destined goal.

THE distant snorting of the "Iron Horse" was heard, with pleasure or dismay as the case might be, as early as 1825, but it was not till March 1833 that that many-sided genius, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, was appointed engineer of the Great Western Railway, and not till 1835 that the G.W.R. Act was passed, after bitter opposition. Lord Wharncliffe, the most active supporter of the bill, urged that Bristol deserved a railway as much as Liverpool, "its great commercial rival." "Agreed," said the promoters of the Southampton Railway, "but the new line should run from Basing and not through Reading." The Reading route, they pointed out, involved making the long and "dangerous" Box tunnel; moreover it cut up so much agricultural land, and, according to the Duke of Buccleuch, was "unnecessarily inconvenient with respect to the personal residences of a great body of landed proprietors." The Provost and Fellows of Eton College would not hear of the line coming nearer than Slough, and made

the Company promise not to have a station there and to patrol the line with policemen lest the precious Eton boys should be run over. The company, however, evaded their promise by hiring two rooms in a public-house for an office and stopping the trains although there was no station. The authorities of the Oxford University were also vehement opponents of the scheme, and when the first bill was thrown out a public meeting was held at Slough to commemorate the event. These learned dons were adopting the same attitude as that of the inhabitants of Cambridge, who, to this day, have to walk or drive about a mile and a half to their station.

At last all opposition was overcome, and on June 4, 1838, the line was opened from London to Maidenhead. At this time more coaches passed through Maidenhead than through any other town in England (as many as ninety a day), and their passengers soon learned to make the first or last stage of their journey by rail. Some of the coaches were put bodily on railway trucks —passengers and all—and did the distance between Paddington and Maidenhead in this uncomfortable fashion. The most notable case was that of the " Beaufort Hunt," a celebrated Bath and London coach which used the London and Maidenhead line almost as soon as it was finished.

On July 1, 1839, the railway reached Twyford, and in March 1840 Reading. Three months later the line was opened between Reading and Steventon. How the inhabitants of Pangbourne and Whitchurch must have opened their old eyes and pricked up their ears when they saw and heard for the first time an actual train full of passengers run over the new bridge, draw up at the rustic station, and with a wild shriek steam away into the unknown !

BASILDON AND WHITCHURCH FROM STREATLEY HILL

From aquatint after J. Farington, 1793

There are some pretty pictures of Pangbourne station built of flint rubble and red brick, " in Elizabethan style " ! I well remember it and the two lines of rails, the two boarded platforms and the wooden bridge (a later addition) passing from one side to the other. Country stations were mostly made like this ; but at Slough and Reading, up to 1897, there was only one enormously long platform, one end of which served for the up trains and the other for the down. This quaint and dangerous plan, a modification of which is extremely common abroad, originated from an idea in the minds of the first railway builders that railroads were just roads and that stations should be like wayside inns. The open third class carriages, the guard perched in a small box outside one of the coaches, and the custom of allowing people to travel in their own carriages lashed on to trucks, also originated from the same idea.

It was exciting for us as children to travel by the G.W.R. because the gauge differed from that of other lines in being seven feet instead of four feet eight-and-a-half inches, which is now the gauge on all the main English railways. The track was thus very wide, twice seven feet, plus the six feet between the lines and five feet on each side made thirty feet as compared with the usual nineteen feet (maximum nineteen feet eight inches) on other railways. The rails were laid on longitudinal instead of transverse sleepers. But our chief interest was in the broad flat engines with long funnels and driving wheels of six, seven, eight and even ten feet diameter. The immense width of the carriages (ten feet) was a boon to our large family. Twelve persons were, more or less easily, accommodated in a second class, and eight sumptuously in a first class

compartment. Some of the first class compartments were divided by doors in the middle, thus making two small compartments for four persons each. At first Brunel's idea was to secure smooth travelling by supplying the passenger coaches with four large wheels only. They were to be outside the coaches like carriage wheels. The plan was soon given up ; but the wheels were still so large that they made awkward great projections under the seats.

The " Battle of the Gauges," as it was called, was fought long and bitterly. The G.W.R. always came off best in trials of speed, weight-carrying and comfort, but the narrow-gauge opposition headed by George and Robert Stephenson was too strong for Brunel and his colleagues and they were obliged to give in and lay down a third rail so as to provide a narrow as well as a broad track. The first narrow gauge train ran from Paddington via Oxford to Birmingham on October 1, 1861, and by 1892 the extra third rail and every other remnant of the broad gauge system had completely disappeared. To many it seemed like a conquest of the good by the less good.

The double track as far as Didcot was laid down in 1893. This involved remodelling Pangbourne station, which was then adorned with shrubs given by our late neighbour, Alfred Waterhouse, of Yattendon.

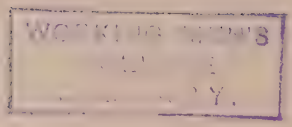
In discussing the railway it has been necessary to stray outside our own parish. Fortunately for us there would have been physical difficulties amounting almost to impossibilities in taking the line through Whitchurch. It would have meant tunnelling under Hart's Lock woods. Fortunately also there was not room to make it between Shooter's Hill and the river, and moreover, according to an old print after Farington and a map

of 1761, and personal inspection to-day, there was a little valley all ready for it to run into in the place now occupied by the cutting beyond the station. Pangbourne reach therefore kept its original and far-famed beauty unimpaired until in an evil hour the thought occurred to a Londoner of scooping out seven holes in the side of Shooter's Hill and stuffing into them that row of houses which some wag has christened "The Seven Deadly Sins." We Whitchurch folk hear indeed an occasional whistle and the distant roar of the trains when the wind is south-west, but even from the top of the hill it is hard to catch a glimpse of them till they are almost out of sight.

Basildon bridge, like that at Moulsford, is a skew bridge built of brick. Such skew bridges apparently delighted Brunel. Somehow (perhaps by using skew bricks) he managed to get the brick surfaces quite smooth. The difficulty of the task may be estimated by looking at the rough surfaces left by the builders of the second bridge when the line was widened.

In the field to the west of the road to Basildon church were found two skeletons, some pottery and the foundations of a Roman Villa with some tessellated pavement. This is yet another reminder of how firmly the Romans established themselves in this immediate neighbourhood. Our British ancestors, slinking out of the woods on to that fine promontory where the badger-earth is, or used to be, which commands so grand a view of Goring Gap, would have seen below them, not Basildon church and farm, nor G.W.R. trains careering along at sixty miles an hour, but at least one square single-storied red-roofed building or enclosure, probably measuring one

hundred feet each side, which constituted a Roman Villa. And here dwelt their foreign conquerors—mere Italians indeed—but men of a much higher civilization than themselves and far better acquainted with all the arts both of peace and war.



XVII

AUGUST 1922

SPRINGS OF THE DISTRICT

And she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wouldest thou? Who answered, Give me a blessing; for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs.—JOSHUA xv. 18, 19.

ACHSAH was a wise woman, and if she had lived on the top of the Chilterns she would have wanted some water-meadows by the Thames. Our country up here would be perfect if there were streams running down the valleys. But that would be against nature. You never see a babbling brook in a chalk coombe; and if coombes were being hollowed out by brooks they would not be so rounded and so smooth.

It is true that there are plenty of springs from the bottoms of the chalk hills feeding those clear chalk streams which are the haunts of lusty trout and dry-fly fishermen. But the hill-tops are everlastingly dry. The late George Goff, who worked on this farm, man and boy, for sixty years or more, said he remembered when he was young having to go down to the river, after long days in the harvest field, to fetch drinking water; which shows that there were dry years before 1921 and 1922, and also that even the ponds sometimes

went dry—those precious ponds from which they used to obtain their tadpoley drinking water before the deep wells were made. It was like the hard case of Stokenchurch last summer when they had to send down to Lewknor or West Wycombe for water.

There are no streams on the downs, because chalk is almost as porous as a sponge. Even after a terrific thunder shower there is hardly a trickle down our coombe. The water soaks into the chalk, and quickly too; and it is only where the chalk is capped by gravels and clays (as was explained in the first of these articles) that this rapid soakage does not take place. Then, in very clayey places, permanent ponds may be made by man, or formed spontaneously. Such are Cray's pond, Poplar's pond, Cheesemoor pond (now generally dry), Tine-pit pond and the ponds by the high road opposite "The Slabs," all of which were originally on the unenclosed Goring Heath or Whitchurch Common. Similar quite small ponds were made in some of the cottage gardens. No doubt the larger ponds were dug by our ancestors who had grazing rights on the common and who had no other means of obtaining water for themselves or their cattle; for as their cottages were thatched they could do little or nothing with the rain water. These ponds even during the late drought had eighteen inches, two feet, or even more of clear water in them (to say nothing of broken pots and pans and rubbish which I strongly protest against and urge my fellow villagers to remove) and this suggests that they may contain springs. The surface water in the gravels does certainly bubble out, usually in feeble and half-hearted springs, near the edge of the gravel and clay cap on the chalk. There is one such between the two ponds near "The Slabs" (but this may be only

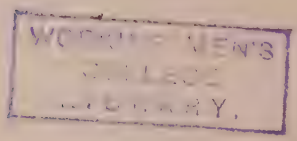
a land drain); there is another on the terrace above Hardwick House, and others are to be seen near the Pack Saddle inn, and about Caversham and above Shiplake. These are often two or three hundred feet above the river and may be called "the upper springs."

The rain that falls upon the chalk goes down and down till it meets a dense layer in the lower chalk which will not let it pass through—except in places where there happen to be cracks or holes. Now as the porous upper and middle chalk may be many hundreds of feet thick, a vast underground reservoir of water is formed which finds outlets in ways that we must not discuss here, confining ourselves only to the chalk springs of our own neighbourhood which we may call the "lower or nether springs."

The chalk downs may, very roughly indeed, be compared to a bath-sponge in a pudding basin, half the sponge being in the basin and half above it. Water sprinkled over the sponge will gradually fill that part of it which is in the basin and at last begin to overflow the brim; not in one sheet of water, but in sundry trickling streams. In the same way when the chalk basin is full the water overflows and makes its way to the surface through weak spots near the foot of the hills. That is why there are beautiful bubbling springs at "The Leather Bottle" near Cleeve, at North Stoke and Mongewell with their ornamental lakes, at Ewelme and Blewbury with their watercress beds, and all along the Vale of White Horse, and the celebrated "flowing spring" which gives its name to a public-house on the Caversham–Henley road and waters the extensive beds of willows, or "rods" as the natives call them. I know of no chalk springs in Whitchurch, but there is said to be one at Hardwick now covered over. Others

almost certainly burst into the bed of the river. When the Thames forced its way through Goring Gap (see No. II) it cut a slice out of the Chilterns at least as far down as the level at which the water stands to-day in the great sponge to which we have compared these hills. So no doubt such springs exist. When the new Goring lock was being made the other day there was a troublesome inrush of water which necessitated constant pumping. This may have been a spring of this nature; but possibly it was only a leakage through a weak place in the bottom of the lock from pressure of the water outside.

Our distinguished neighbour Sir Aubrey Strahan, of the Geological Survey, has shown that the level of the water in the chalk is higher and higher as we pass further away from the river. This may account for the fact that there are certain chalk springs at some height above the river that only burst out occasionally. Such is "Trunk Ditch" near Ipsden which is said to flow every seven years, and then to flood many acres of ground. It need hardly be said the intervals are quite irregular and depend on the rainfall. The seven years is only an "old wives' fable."



XVIII

SEPTEMBER 1922

A DRY NUMBER ON WELLS

Drink waters out of thine own cistern and running waters out of thine own well.—PROVERBS v. 15.

WHEN you turn the tap and draw a glass of that excellent liquor "Adam's ale," does it ever occur to you to think where it comes from and how it reaches Whitchurch? Once, of course, it was in a cloud, but on that no more must be said, as the formation of clouds is clearly not local history. Certain it is that the cloud dropped it on the Chilterns, and not so very recently either, as may be gathered from the fact that the supply from which this glass of water comes showed no sign of failing when this year's dry spring followed the extraordinary drought of 1921. The rain that fell upon the exposed chalk soaked in at once, that which fell upon the cap of gravels and clays more slowly, and at last a large portion of it reached the great basin of water under the Thames valley and started off towards the sea, though destined to supply on its way countless springs and the huge artesian wells of London.

Profiting by Nature's instruction, the South Oxfordshire waterworks, which came into existence many years ago, sank a well at Cleeve into the great chalk sponge. The depth was first forty and then fifty feet, that is about down to the river level, or, in other words, rather below

that at which the water stands in the chalk under the waterworks. But, as this well did not give water enough they ran a bore from the bottom of it one hundred feet further down still. Twenty years ago they became nervous about the supply and made another well seventy feet deep only a few feet away from the first, which was then discarded. In 1914 when this second well began to give out they cleared out the old one, deepened it by six feet and put a tube into the bore, and it turns out to be far the better of the two ; and now that they are joined together by a " heading " or gallery, and two " headings " have been run out of the second well north and south, there seems to be a practically inexhaustible supply. They raise eight thousand gallons an hour during seven twenty-four-hour days a week, and it makes no difference in the depth of the water, which varies between twenty-one and twenty-four feet in the seventy-foot well. It is refreshing to see this constant flow of crystal-clear cold water (derived from the chalk remember—nothing to do with the more or less polluted Thames) flowing into a great tank. From this it is driven by force-pumps up to Woodcote, which is six hundred feet above sea level, and from the Woodcote reservoir the force of gravity brings it down here, and we accept it without a thought as being in the natural course of things, just as our fathers accepted their tadpoley ponds with hardly a murmur.

The Tilehurst water which is supplied to the lower village also comes from the chalk or chalk and greensand. As the company's well is two hundred and ninety-two feet above sea level and the top of the great tank, which forms such a prominent feature in the Tilehurst landscape and holds one hundred and eighty thousand gallons, is one hundred feet higher still (387·9 feet) they can easily

supply by the force of gravity alone the upper parts of Caversham (about two hundred and eighty feet above sea level) as well as their customers in Pangbourne and Whitchurch. From the bottom of the well, which is one hundred and eighty-six feet deep, a bore was sunk further in the chalk. When a depth of one hundred and six feet was reached (i.e. two hundred and ninety-two feet from the surface) there was such an inrush of water that the workmen had to run for their lives, leaving behind their tools and even the coats which they had taken off. The water then quickly rose to one hundred and twelve feet from well head which is the present mean summer rest level, that is the level maintained when they cease pumping on Sundays. It happens to be almost the same as the Thames water level at Tilehurst nine hundred yards away. The rush of water probably came from what is called chalk rock, a recognized water-bearing layer between the upper and middle chalk.

These Cleeve and Tilehurst wells are typical of the "deep wells" which may be made anywhere in this district. The higher above the river the deeper they must be. Up here they have to be three hundred or four hundred feet deep. In the lower village chalk is reached at from twenty to twenty-five feet. If the well be made through gravel that may be water-logged, or sewage-logged, the upper part must be bricked or rendered in some other way impervious, but even then there is great risk of pollution. If small (Abyssinian) tubes only are sunk the danger is minimized, but not removed.

Deep chalk wells are not all equally productive, even though they may be only a few feet apart. This depends on the presence of actual streams in the substance of the chalk owing to irregularities in its structure. Some of

the most important of these underground streams are said to follow the lines of valleys.

The deep chalk wells were for many years a great boon to this upland district. Most of them were made by the patriotic energy of Squire Gardiner of Coombe Park about 1850–60. The one near Butler's Farm is dated 1854. It is, however, laborious work to raise the water. It takes a strong man seven minutes to raise a bucket here. So these wells are now neglected; but it would be foolish to fill them up, for some day the introduction of improved and cheap mechanical pumps may bring them into use again. The hardness of the water in deep chalk wells varies very much, but in this district it is always much greater than that of the water of the Thames. The temperature is about 50° F.

Shallow or surface wells in this neighbourhood are of two kinds. First, a well sunk anywhere into the gravel near the Thames will strike water at or about the level of the water in the river. As the same level is maintained in any neighbouring uncemented cesspool it is needless to say that such wells are highly dangerous. There were, and I believe are, several such wells in the lower village, in some of which the water stands at six or seven feet from the surface in summer and much less during floods. This is simply river water filtered, but possibly also defiled by passing through "alluvium" (ballast) and valley gravel. I am told and can well believe that a gentle flow from west to east, i.e. parallel with the river, may be seen in these wells. When the G.W.R. were refused permission to take water for their locomotives near Basildon bridge they promptly sank a well seventeen feet deep close to the river and thus checkmated the Thames Conservancy.

The other surface wells are those upon the high ground.

They may be sometimes sunk quite successfully into pockets of clay holding water or into the course of the "upper springs" spoken of last month. It is chiefly in the discovery of such springs or pockets that the skill or luck of the water-diviner or dowser is brought into play. It is an uncanny gift, if it really be a gift, on which, as my space is almost exhausted and I have never seen it practised, I will observe a discreet silence. The Roman inhabitants of Silchester used to line their surface wells with wine or oil casks, several of which may be seen in the Reading Museum.

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XIX

OCTOBER 1922

THE MODERN THAMES

All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.—ECCLESIASTES i. 7.

STIMULATED by this paradox of King Solomon's which shows his profound knowledge of hydrography (forgive the long word) and in spite of expecting to be told I have water on the brain, I propose once more to plunge into "our river," or rather to ask you to stand with me upon the bridge and meditate upon where all the water comes from, and, for the matter of that, where it all goes to; for, although heavy rains further west no doubt cause floods, yet even after prolonged droughts there is still an ample stream. There is no record of the precise average daily flow—year in year out—at Whitchurch bridge, but roughly speaking it is about eight hundred and fifty million gallons, a great part of which is derived from springs. The amount of variation in the flow depends upon rainfall, as may be gathered from observations made at Teddington, after, of course, the Thames has been joined by the Kennet, the Loddon, the Wye, the Colne, the Wey and the Mole. There, while the lowest daily record has been as low as two hundred million gallons, the maximum has been known to reach twenty thousand million gallons.

The tributaries of the Thames above Whitchurch are so small that, at first, it hardly seems as if they could, all combined, make up so large a river as that by which we dwell. "Thames Head," near Cirencester, the reputed source, is shown in old prints as a spouting spring, or as a stream flowing freely from a stone tower. Since three pumping-stations have been made near by it now always dries up in the summer; but about October it bursts out again and floods the green meadows through which it used to flow all the year round in former days.

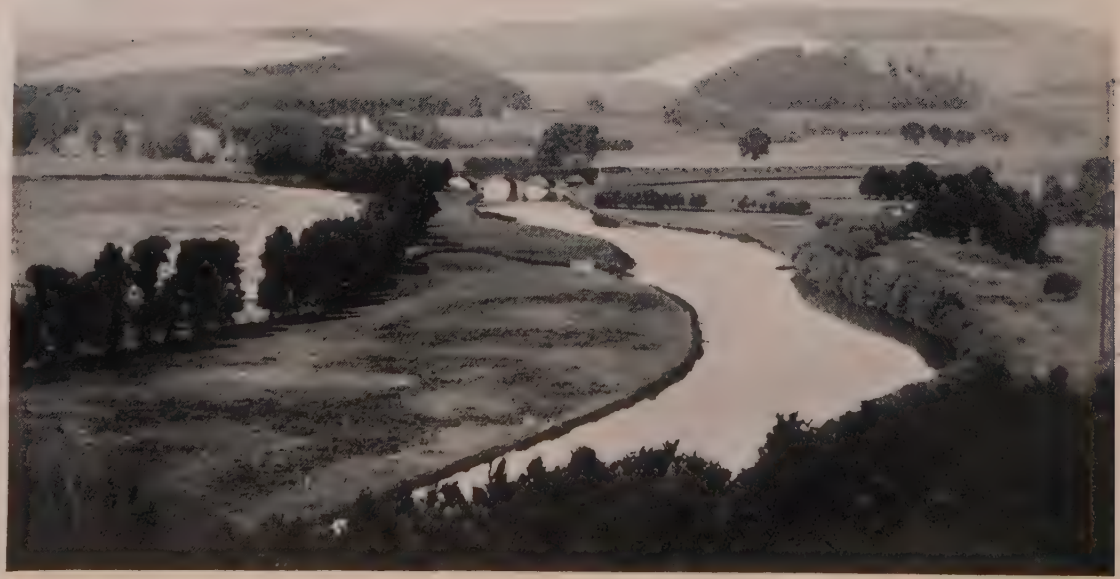
Eight miles lower down at Cricklade the infant Thames is just a rapid brook on which, however, I observed two minute punts. It is only ten or twelve feet wide at the bridge, but before the Thames-and-Severn canal diverted the traffic in 1789 large barges came up to Cricklade. Now the river is unnavigable and the canal is disused, empty and grass-grown.

At Lechlade, eighteen miles from its source, the Thames has become quite a respectable river with its locks and weirs and, if it were not that it is often choked with weeds, there would be comfortable room for a pair of sculls. But even by the time it reaches Oxford it is not very much to boast of though it has been joined by the Windrush and the Evenlode (delightful names) which drain a large part of the west side of the Cotswold hills. The Cherwell which enters the Thames by Magdalen towers draws its water from a large area about Banbury, but you can hardly get a boat up it above Islip, six miles from Oxford; and as for the only "navigable" tributary between Oxford and Whitchurch, the Thame, it needs a canoe and a hatchet and the energy of that indomitable surgeon, Sir Frederick Treves, to force a passage above the ancient town of

Dorchester. The Cherwell and the Thame together are too small to account for the obviously larger size of the Thames at Whitchurch than at Oxford. It is therefore evident that much of the normal flow is provided by such small streams as the Ock at Abingdon and by others smaller still derived from the greensand and chalk springs at the south side of the Vale of White Horse and by the chalk springs from the Chilterns, about which enough has been already said. And in addition the surface water and unseen springs bursting into the river bed must not be forgotten.

So the first of our two questions is answered. The water flowing under the bridge has come from the heavens above or the earth beneath, out of Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire. The answer to the second is that it is on its way towards London town and the Nore. By the time the Thames reaches the sea, after receiving the Medway, it will have drained five thousand nine hundred and twenty-four square miles ; and seeing that one inch of rain equals twenty-two thousand six hundred and eighty-seven and a half gallons or one hundred and one tons five hundredweights two quarters nineteen pounds to the acre, it is easy to understand that fleets of big steamers can be berthed in the Port of London where one-third of the commerce of the United Kingdom is carried on : a commerce which would have dumbfoundered King Solomon in all his glory, with his fleet of Tarshish coming " once in three years bringing gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks."

And now if anyone who owns a bicycle or a lusty pair of shanks's ponies cares to examine a miniature Thames, its watershed and its banks, its sources and the actual bed of the stream, there is a good example

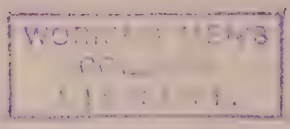


GATEHAMPTON BRIDGE AND STREATLEY HILL

close at hand in the Pang, and exploration of its fifteen-mile valley will lead him into many pleasant places. In starting he should take stock of the volume of water flowing into the Thames at " Trimble Mill " and cast a glance at the mill stream which is typical of all mill and weir streams. Then passing along the Tidmarsh road he should observe two things: first, how much of its water a river gives up to the surrounding country, as witnessed by the lush meadows through which it winds, and second, that this part of the valley is extraordinarily wide. It will be remembered that some people think it was once occupied by a very magnificent Kennet. Much more modest is the valley as we follow it up by the Bradfield road. After passing a picturesque chalk pit the small tributary valley of the Bourne comes in on the left, the top of which we shall visit presently. At Bradfield we cross the much diminished river and a few steps further on a small mill stream which forms a long cut rather like that between Sonning and Wargrave. Half-way between Bradfield and Stanford Dingley we turn to the left and explore the remarkable " blue pool " at Kimber Head near Bradfield Hall. Surrounded by fine trees, it is deep, cool and clear, and has been hollowed out of the clay by countless active chalk springs, which shoot up little fountains of chalky sand and pebbles from the bottom. Large trout luxuriate in the transparent water which, after passing through enormous watercress beds, enters the Pang a few hundred yards away.

By intricate roads the explorer should now make his way to Chapel Row and descend a short distance to the tiny Bourne in order to see an excellent section of the " cap of clay," where the road has lately been cut. Then he must seek the highest point of Lower Bucklebury

Common. Near the cross roads in Carbin's Wood he will find a bog carpeted with characteristic marsh-flowers and mosses, from which oozes the sluggish Bourne covered with a red scum of oxide of iron: a very different affair from the brisk chalk springs. This part of the common is four hundred feet above sea level, and we have to go down two hundred feet to reach the Pang at Bucklebury. It is a miserable stream at the ford on the Hampstead Norris road. We may turn aside at Everington and step into the fields on the right, where the lovely yellow mimulus (monkey flower) grows, in order to see the springs bursting into the bed of the infant river. We may also observe the great heaps of coarse gravel taken from the bed of the stream when it was dry last year; a sample of the material which was brought down by the nobler river of ancient days. The Pang dried up last year as far as this point, and all the fish in it died. The springs started again last March. It is still dry at Hampstead Norris, as the explorer will find on reaching this village after stopping to look at the pretty mill pond at Frilsham. A few more rains on the Chilterns and the springs will flow again above Hampstead Norris. Then the voyage of discovery will have to be prolonged half-way to Compton.



COTTAGES AND SMALL HOUSES

Imagination fondly stoops to trace
The parlour splendours of that festive place;
The white-washed wall, the nicely sanded floor,
The varnish'd clock that click'd behind the door;
The chest, contrived a double debt to pay,
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day;

* * *

While broken tea cups, wisely kept for show,
Ranged o'er the chimney, glistened in a row.

GOLDSMITH.

NO trace remains of the earliest dwellings that were built by the side of the track leading to the ford at Whitchurch. No doubt they were mere huts made of perishable materials. The Romans, who to some extent were our ancestors, built with flint and stone and bricks and excellent mortar. The foundations of their houses still exist below the surface. Sites of some of them have been identified at Pangbourne and Basildon, and guessed at from certain bare lines that sometimes show in the crops in the flat fields below Whitchurch. The houses of the well-to-do were mostly one-storied buildings surrounding a square courtyard, or arranged in corridor fashion, and roofed with red tiles or thatched with sedge.

Strange to say, though the Romans were masters in the art of brick-making, it was completely forgotten after they left the country about A.D. 400 and was only feebly revived in the thirteenth century. Building with bricks did not become common before the fifteenth century, and in this part of the country one has to search about in such old buildings as those at Ewelme or Mapledurham in order to find the thin irregularly shaped bricks sometimes nine and a half or ten inches long, which date back to the time of Queen Elizabeth or even earlier.

Although there are plenty of relics of castles and large houses and churches built during this long period when no bricks were manufactured, there is practically no record and, I believe, there are no remains of cottage architecture in the chalk country, belonging to the interval between the incoming of the Saxons and the time of the Tudor monarchs. However, it is safe to say that, when flint and clay and thatch first began to be used in these parts, the cottages were not better than the crofters' cots in the Scotch highlands and the Irish cabins that may still be seen—one-storey hovels, without chimneys and with windows unworthy of the name, chickens strolling in and out of the door and perhaps a litter of pigs in a corner boarded off in the dwelling-room.

It is easy to see which are the oldest cottages both in upper and lower Whitchurch. They are all built in much the same style, of brick, or of brick and flint, or of timber with panels of wattle-and-dab or four and a half-inch brickwork, the bricks being thinner than ordinary modern bricks. Many of these old cottages are thatched. The smallest of them are only two-roomed but most of them are four-roomed, the height of the

rooms being sometimes not more than six feet. Often after a few feet of brickwork (of course without a damp course) the upper parts are made of rough-hewn oak timbers enclosing panels of wattle-and-dab. Our bricklayers call this " Bomateg " or " Bomanteg," a queer old word, also written " Beau-montague " and may imply dishonest plastering. It is suprising how this simple material made of hazel and dried clay mixed with wheat or rye straw has resisted for centuries the attacks of the weather from without and generations of inhabitants from within. True the wattle is often worm-eaten, but, though the twigs may be accidently snapped across, they are still almost as hard as iron. The bricks in the lower parts are sometimes only laid in a sort of sandy clay, probably got from the " Reading beds " which are handy. The whole has been covered with a thin layer of plaster inside and out and an unexpectedly weatherproof wall results.

In some of the smaller cottages the roof descends over the back room or rooms till the thatch almost touches the ground. These back premises are not always a part of the original structure. The larger cottages often had tiled roofs and were sometimes protected or adorned with weather-tiles. One of the oldest and best of them was Kent's the butcher's in which I had summer lodging for several years, and very comfortable it was. It was pulled down to make way for " The Rise."

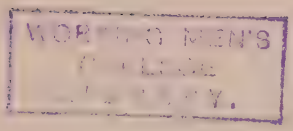
When the wattle-and-dab was replaced in the panels by bricks, as was frequently the case, they were generally laid horizontally but sometimes in " herringbone " pattern. This was said to involve less cutting of the bricks. Thus a pleasing effect was obtained from what was intended only to be economy.

And what about their age? Attempts are made to determine the age of cottages by examining the chamfering of the beams, the moulding of the window jambs, the size and shape of the bricks and similar details; but it is a difficult problem, for many of them were copied long after they were supposed to have gone out of fashion. My learned friends tell me that they may be of any age though probably not more than two or three hundred years.

As time went on more substantial brick houses were built alongside, or replaced the old cottages. It is just as difficult to put precise dates to these. Like other villages Whitchurch kept slowly growing through the last two centuries and its inhabitants glorified themselves in more solid though less picturesque habitations. They became plainer and less rustic in appearance, till the climax was reached when those curious red-brick houses with pointed windows and slate roofs were introduced. Our oldest inhabitants (there are some veterans amongst us) cannot remember when they were built. It was probably about 1820 during what was called "the gothic revival." I leave quite modern architecture to speak for itself.

In spite of all, Whitchurch is still quite a pretty village, but even within our own memory it was prettier still. There was a nice old timber-yard at the corner now occupied by "The Mount"; Mr. Sellwood's premises had a more countrified though a less prosperous appearance; "The White Hart" a few doors lower down made the fourth public-house in Whitchurch! "The Old Vicarage" stood facing the butcher's cottage; and then came two old cottages where the doctor's house now stands; a row of lime trees ran along the east side of the road below "Swanston" reaching nearly

as far as the first of "the nineteen trees" on the opposite side of the way, and, though hardly within living memory, the village pound was on the site of Miss Slatter's present abode [Walliscote Cottage].



XXI

DECEMBER 1922

LARGER HOUSES

Somewhat back from the village street
Stands the old-fashioned country-seat,
Across its antique portico
Tall poplar trees their shadows throw;
And from its station in the hall
An ancient time-piece says to all,—
Forever—never!
Never—forever!

LONGFELLOW.

LAST month we spoke about the smaller houses in the village. Dotted amongst them are a few larger ones, some of which must have existed for a long time, but it is not easy to put dates to most of them. A hundred years ago—perhaps a hundred and fifty—Whiteways, Whitchurch House, the old part of Swanston, Thames Bank and Walliscote were certainly in existence. The two last are shown in prints of 1793, in one of which the river front of Walliscote appears as a long white house with thirty-one windows; but no reliance can be placed on this, as the artist, Farington, was apt to take great liberties with his subjects.

In an earlier number (No. XI) we reluctantly gave up the idea of associating Walliscote with the trusty old Knight Thomas Walysch, in favour of a more prosaic

COTTAGE WITH HERRING-BONE BRICKWORK, WHITCHURCH

account of its history. The authorities at my command, which are but few, do not agree with one another. Kelly (of the directories) says that it was built at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a hundred years after Sir Thomas's day, and restored in 1690 and 1899; but others, e.g. Canon Slatter, say, or imply, that it was built by the Rev. John Wallis. This distinguished man, though a Cambridge graduate, was made Professor of Geometry in the University of Oxford by the masterful Protector, Oliver Cromwell in 1649 (if that were possible)—the year, it will be remembered, in which King Charles I lost his head, and the year after that in which, as a prisoner, he used to play bowls at the old public-house which once existed at Collins End. John Wallis, besides being a parson and a doctor and one of the greatest mathematicians this country has ever produced, was extraordinarily clever at reading writings in cipher. He was thus of great use to the Parliamentary Party in deciphering captured Royalist dispatches. But he seems to have played rather a double game, for after the Restoration he made out that he had not disclosed to the Parliamentarians *all* the Royalist secrets he had discovered. Anyhow he was made chaplain to Charles II, and was one of those appointed to revise the Prayer Book in 1661. He was rich, and owned the manor of Soundes (or Soundess) near Nettlebed; and his son John must have been richer still, for he married the daughter and heiress of the wealthy John Harris of Soundes House. Soundes House is one of the places where the too celebrated actress Nell Gwynne is said to have lived for a time, and as she and John Wallis, Jun., were of exactly the same age it is highly probable that they knew one another.

If John Wallis the Professor really built Walliscote, it

probably dates from Cromwell's time, but it has been so much altered that there are no architectural features by which its age can be fixed. There is clear evidence of the existence of an earlier house on the property, perhaps that mentioned by Kelly, possibly something much more ancient. Discoloured lines appear in dry seasons on the beautiful lawns, and experience tells us that such lines in lawns and meadows and arable fields often indicate the burial places, so to say, of buildings, perhaps many hundreds of years old, the existence of which has been long forgotten. The site seems a likely one for the most important house in the village, and one likes to imagine that a manor house stood there in ancient days. It has been suggested that "Manor Farm" was the manor house; but this is most improbable. There is indeed a black painted stone tablet, on which the Whistler arms are carved, over the mantelpiece in the principal room, but the house itself is probably not older than Walliscote.

Samuel Pepys, the diarist, met Wallis in 1666, but this is all he says: "Here also Dr. Wallis, the famous Scholar and Mathematician; but he promises little"; the meaning of which is obscure.

It is right to "praise famous men and our fathers that begat us," but as for John Wallis, though his descendants undoubtedly still inhabited Whitchurch in the eighteenth century, there is, I think, not much evidence that he himself had ever much to do with the place.

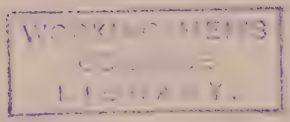
Enough has now been said to enable us to see, with the mind's eye, what Whitchurch looked like as it slowly developed during the reigns of Charles II, James II, William and Mary, and the first three Georges. For natural objects remain unchanged. The same sunshine and shade passed over the oaks and beeches then as now,

and the same flowers brightened the cottage gardens. There were, indeed, clumsier boats and punts and barges on the river and equally clumsy vehicles on the rough and rutty roads. The inhabitants too were, from our point of view, oddly dressed in knee-breeches and broad-brimmed hats and smock-frocks and so on, but otherwise the changes were but few till near the end of the eighteenth century.

Up to this time there was no Coombe Park, and no Bozedown except Bozedown Field, some distance from the present house. Open fields, meadows and downland occupied the position of these estates, and the lower lands by the river were only thinly planted with trees. Then about 1780 two friends appeared upon the scene, Samuel Gardiner and Francis Sykes, and settled down within sight of one another on the opposite sides of the Thames. Both had made fortunes in the East Indies. Francis Sykes (soon after created Sir Francis) bought the ancient park of Basildon and put up his grey stone mansion half-way up the hill side. Samuel Gardiner bought a large proportion of the old enclosures in this parish. This was before the Enclosure Acts (see Nos. V and VI). They did not make one continuous whole, but out of a part of them he made Coombe Park and had the property laid out by the celebrated landscape gardener Repton of Romford, whose report is dated "on the spot Nov. 1799." Coombe Lodge was built in 1794, and in the words of Edward Mogg, Editor of *Patterson's Roads*, Mr. Gardiner had "the merit of entirely creating the home-scenery around his mansion." He became lord of the manor on the extinction of the Whistler family. A tablet in the church records the fact that his fifth son, Allen Francis (born 1794, at the time that his father was staying at Basildon vicarage

while his house was building), died of starvation in Tierra del Fuego whilst trying to establish a Christian mission on its shores. The house—not half the size of the present mansion—was enlarged by a grandson of Samuel Gardiner and again by Mr. John Foster, who bought the Coombe property about 1884. His son Kenneth is still lord of the manor, though the estate has almost entirely passed out of his hands.

Bozedown was not built till about 1870 by Mr. Fanning, an Australian, and the present house is more recent still, as the first was burnt to the ground on New Year's Eve, 1905.



HARDWICK

but every sound is sweet;
Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn;
The moan of doves in immemorial elms;
And murmuring of innumerable bees.

TENNYSON.

THE Lybbe monuments in the church (see No. XI) remind us that Hardwick House and a large part of the estate are in Whitchurch parish, though the two manors seem to have been originally distinct. There were de Herdewykes or de Hardewyckes at Hardwick from about the time of the Norman conquest till the reign of Henry VIII, four hundred and fifty years—a long innings! Then, in 1526, as there were no male heirs, the name died out, and the property was sold to Richard Lybbe of Tavistock and Shinfield. Lybbes, Lybbe-Powyses and Powys-Lybbes remained in possession for another four hundred years, i.e. till 1909, when it was sold to the late Sir Charles Rose, who had been a tenant for many years.

The curious may puzzle their heads about the meaning of the word Hardwick. There are at least four other Hardwicks in England, and the name is supposed to mean *herd-pasture* or *-marsh* or *-place*, or herdsman's farm.

This seems a likely derivation, so the blue-blooded de Herdewykes may have been only glorified shepherds after all, and perhaps took their name from their Normandy pastures. Anyhow for us they are almost prehistoric; only a few hints of their existence are to be picked up from fusty old manuscripts. Thus William de Hardewyke was a "juror" in 1279, and Ralph a "witness" in 1295 and one of twelve "inquisitors" (coroner's jury) who inquired into the death of Sir John de Chausy of Mapledurham in 1313; and a later William passes like a ghost across the stage in 1355. Another scrap of history interesting to us has been unearthed by Dr. Cooke, the vicar of Mapledurham, in these manuscripts of the Blount family. On July 24, 1479, twelve "inquisitors" under two presiding officers met at Whitchurch and stated on oath "that the road in the Westfelde of Mapledurham leading from Culmhousefelde [afterwards Culver, Culmoor, and now Curmerfield] in Hardewyke to Shypcotelane in Mapledurham is not a road for leading or driving wheeled vehicles [*caretta*] by the tenants of the Prince in Whitchurch [the Prince of Wales afterwards the unhappy Edward V, one of the Princes murdered in the Tower] unless they obtain leave of the lord of Mapledurham, but that it is a lawful way for passengers on foot or horse-back and not otherwise." They go on to describe the old British road (see No. IV) still easily traceable, though in parts only a foot or bridle way, "leading from Walyngford bridge by the lane called Dacones lane [the present Watery lane?] and close to Mongewelle Court, Northstoke, Southstoke, and by Gatehampton, Whitchurch, Mapledurham, and so as far as Causham brygge and Reding."

Walking or riding along this ancient road we see over

the hedge one side of Hardwick House; from the river the other or southern side appears across a broad lawn flanked by stately avenues of elms. Tradition says that portions of it date back to the time of Richard II, and it is easy to believe that the great arched cellars and other parts of the house are much older than the main building which belongs mostly to the Tudor period. It was much repaired and enlarged about 1670 after the great injuries sustained during the civil wars. Other repairs were carried out in 1839, when the whitewash was removed from the exterior and the white paint from the oak stairs which had been ruthlessly applied by a tenant at the end of the eighteenth century. Sir Charles Rose made great additions, especially to the southern side, which make this look almost like the front of the house. But it was not the original front. Like Mapledurham, which is a much purer example of Elizabethan architecture, the principal front of the Tudor house faces a little south of east, and the view from it, between a great cedar and yews and other trees, is across the fields towards Mapledurham. It corresponds to the view from the front of Mapledurham through the long avenue of elms parallel with the river towards Caversham.

Good Queen Bess must often have slept away from home judging from the number of houses at which she is said to have spent a night. Amongst many panelled rooms at Hardwick, one of the largest is "Queen Elizabeth's bedroom." It was ornamented in her honour either before or after the visit. Her medallion portrait looks down from three bosses in the elaborately moulded ceiling surrounded by similar representations of Joshua, Julius Cæsar, Jeroboam and Fame—a motley group! We may imagine her, in ruff and farthingale, stepping up the broad staircase attended by the Lybbes of the

day. It is a pleasanter picture than that of poor Charles I at the old public-house (now " Holly Copse ") at Collins End, who

> Sought in a cheerful glass his cares to drown,
> And changed a guinea ere he lost a crown.

A fascinating account of the life at Hardwick during the second half of the eighteenth century will be found in *Passages from the Diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys* (edited by Emily J. Clemenson, 1899). This lady, the daughter of a wealthy Dr. Girle, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, who owned estates in Berkshire, only resided at Hardwick from 1762 to 1784, for when the family were grown up the parents let the house and moved to Fawley Rectory, near Henley. The first tenant was a Mr. Gardiner. I do not know whether he was the builder of Coombe Lodge, but it is said that he was guilty of the whitewashing.

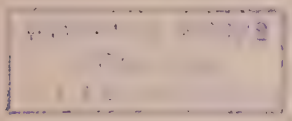
Mrs. Lybbe Powys's diaries contain many interesting details about the neighbourhood. Thus she describes the severe frost of 1776 when they were snowed up and the river was frozen over from Whitchurch to Mapledurham and " some of our people were silly enough to walk over it," and they had no news or letters from Henley or Reading for ten days and no call from the butcher for a fortnight. In forty years' experience I have only once seen the river frozen over from side to side. That was in January 1893 when there were only a few open patches in Pangbourne reach, and above that it was completely frozen over as far as the islands, so that skating was in progress, with Ashley's men and a barrowful of life-buoys in attendance. It was said that there was also good skating between Shillingford and Benson.

In the woods above Hardwick is a field called " May-

HARDWICK HOUSE, SOUTH-EAST VIEW

pole ground." Long may the name continue to recall the ancient custom of dancing round the maypole! It is more than five hundred years since Chaucer wrote "Forth goeth all the court both most and least, to fetch the flowers fresh"; and three hundred since Spenser sang "Siker this morrow, no longer ago, I saw a shole of shepherds out go" to "fetch home May." Tennyson's "May Queen" was a rather sentimental favourite in the days of my youth, but now she is as dead as Queen Anne. So is Jack-in-the-green, though I have seen him, not so many years ago, enveloped in green boughs, prancing about our lanes with his merry companions.

Thus round this old mansion are gathered memories of many and great changes in the manners and customs of our country, and one may well wonder what it will be like if ever a last Rose of Hardwick should be left blooming alone upon the family tree; should this prove to be as sturdy as or longer-lived than its two predecessors, will England still be Merrie England?



XXIII

FEBRUARY 1923

SURNAMES

The country churchyard, with each mossy stone, is, apart from the diviner lessons it teaches, a living page of history ; and even the parish register, instead of being a mere record of dry and uninteresting facts, becomes instinct with the lives and surroundings of our English forefathers.—BARDSLEY.

IT might have been expected that in a village like this many families would have continued to exist for ages and generations and so form living links between Whitchurch ancient and modern. But, on the contrary, a search amongst old and recent documents dating from Domesday Book to Kelly's Directory and dealing with some hundreds of names, discovers very few of the present ones in records even of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We come, as our names show, from the north and the south, the east and the west, from Devonshire and Wiltshire, France, Scotland and Wales and other outlandish parts to replace families that have died out or emigrated to more attractive quarters. Holmeses, Gutteridges, Pococks, Higgses and a few more are all that remain, and they are not all descendants of those who bore the same names here in the days of Queen Elizabeth. Some families gradually die out. Others quickly increase in numbers. A few

of the older names such as Frewen, Martin, Young and Bushnell have only recently become extinct; while those of some well-established families such as the Lewendens, Goodalls and Lambournes do not appear in the parish registers till about 1800.

The other day I was poking about an ancient cottage under repair, and, while seeking information from the intelligent bricklayer who was at work upon it, I casually asked his name. "Sparrowhawk," said he. "And you look it," said I, for he had the sparkling eyes and sharp features that may well have been inherited from an ancestor who was given this *nickname* in the days when hawking and falconry were favourite sports. The name is as old as Domesday (1086) and is said in later days to have degenerated into Spark (we sometimes now speak of a "lively spark"). It is often met with in our own parish documents from the sixteenth century onwards, but my acquaintance must have flown over to Pangbourne or Reading, as there are none of the breed in Whitchurch to-day.

If he had turned the tables on me I should have had to own that, in spite of appearances, my name suggests no special holiness. It is a mere *local surname*, perhaps connected with Godley in Cheshire and only implies that my ancestors (who as it happens were mostly sea-going folk) lived on a meadow, or at a village on a meadow, near an arm of the sea. They drifted through Suffolk, Sussex and Essex before I came here, an emigrant from London.

The study of surnames is most fascinating. They tell the history of a country. The Old Testament patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, being "few and far between," managed very well without them, but when the Jews increased and multiplied and lived in towns and villages,

they invented a cumbrous system of surnames which they still preserve for private use, though outwardly, for practical purposes, they assume names more or less like those of the countries into which they have been dispersed. Different races adopt different systems. The Romans had three names apiece. The more modest Briton is well equipped with two. Anything beyond that is for him a luxury and perhaps a nuisance.

It is easy to understand the origin of surnames, but difficult to see how any of them, except those like Thom-son or Mac-tavish, both of which mean son of Thomas, came to be handed down in families. Surnames are said to have come gradually into use in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Be that as it may, we find that batches of surnames were introduced in connection with certain striking historical events, such as the Norman Conquest, the Crusades, the translation of the Bible into English, or the Reformation. Some of these remain to this day, some disappeared as the families died out, some were discarded as they were thought objectionable and others were changed almost beyond recognition.

Mr. Bardsley, from whose book on English surnames my text is taken, divides them into five classes : 1 Baptismal or personal, 2 Local, 3 Official, 4 Occupational, 5 Nicknames. I have already given illustrations of classes 2 and 5 (local and nicknames). A good example of a *baptismal or personal name* is Tomkins, which means the son of Tomkin, an affectionate familiar form of Thomas. One of the commonest names in this parish and in the whole country is the *occupational* name Smith. Mr. Bardsley says that there are enough Smiths in England to populate a city as large as Leeds, and that therefore he, being a parson, could never read in church

without a smile the verse (1 Sam. xiii. 19) " Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel." The Smiths were forgers of weapons of war and implements of peace. All honour to their clever brains and brawny arms! Two of our larger landowners bear *official surnames*. Howard, or Hayward, probably first meant the guardian of the hedges, though afterwards it came to mean high-warden. The Palmers were certainly palm-bearing pilgrims.

The five classes have thus been illustrated, and it may be interesting and amusing to give other examples from present or past inhabitants of Whitchurch.

Class 1 : *personal names*. James and Thomas explain themselves. Higgs is a form of Richard. So possibly is Riches, though it also may simply mean a rich man. Lybbe is the son of Elizabeth or Isabel ; Macdonald the son of Donald ; Wilcox, the son of William, with the pet name cock added ; Pearson is Peter's son ; Hewitt the son of Hugh, which means mind or soul ; Adams the son of Adam, and Simmonds the son of Simon. More expressive names of this class are Gutteridge the good ruler (Godric was a common Anglo-Saxon name) ; Aldridge the old ruler, and Godfrey which signifies God-peace.

Class 2 : *local surnames* are very common. Birch lived by the birch tree ; Ker and Carey at a fort ; Cardew at a black fort, and Douglas by the black water ; Rayden on the Roe-hill ; Westrop at the west village, Wood by the wood, Deane in the valley, Whitfield by the white or wheat field, Holmes on a river island or by a holm oak, and Cross by the village cross or at cross roads. Ford, Wells, House, Church, Lambourne and London explain themselves, so do North, West and Wiltshire ; but it is not so obvious that Devenish came

from Devonshire, Wallis from Wales, Goodall from Goodall in Yorkshire and Sellwood from the forest of Selwood on the borders of Wilts and Somerset. Of Lewenden I find no recognized explanation; it may well refer to some old Anglo-Saxon named Léofwine whose place of abode was in a valley.

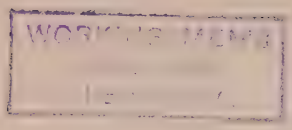
Class 3. Our *official* names are few; but we have or had the following: Marshall, primarily a horse-servant but later a steward; Wyman, a soldier but also perhaps a cowman; Alderman, a duke, magistrate or chief; Parker, a park keeper, and Chambers, a chamber attendant.

Class 4, *occupational*, is with difficulty separated from class 3. We have a Foster or forester, a Gardiner, a Baker, a Wheeler, a Turner, a Chandler, a Painter, and a Mason. Slatter was a slater; Goff a smith, but also a red-headed man; Panter was a pantry keeper or butler; Hinds the son of a peasant; Fuller or ffuller a fuller of cloth; and Flower or fflower an arrow maker.

Lastly we come to class 5: *nicknames*. How expressive are Strong, Young, Green, Gray, White, Brown, Black and Rose! Cox was the son of Cock, no doubt a lively old bird; Lamb's ancestor was mild and lamb-like; but Pocock, which is the same as Peacock, suggests vanity and display; and Head some peculiarity in the appearance of the head. Wrench was a common name here in Edward I's time, it means a trick or wile. Other old names are Crips or Crisp, which indicates a curly head. Paine which stands for Pagan, and Griffin which implies a muddy complexion. Love dwelt amongst us formerly and the Whistlers were lords of the manor.

But I must stop, not for want of material but lack of space, only adding that the interpretation of surnames

is often open to considerable doubt. Like other "historical facts," they emerge but dimly from the mists of the past. For all that, there is enough in these local lists of ours to set us thinking about the manners and customs, the wars and pageants and even the jocular side of our remote ancestors.



XXIV

MARCH 1923

PLACE-NAMES

No. I

Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen.—DEUTERONOMY xxvii. 17.

THE study of place-names is frightfully difficult, but it is so absorbing that some people devote their whole lives to it. This is because the names of places, if you succeed in explaining them correctly, really do tell the history of a country in a way that surnames cannot possibly do. Unlike surnames they are almost permanent. Not quite so, however, because they are often altered as the language of the country changes, and thus, though the ancient root of the name, whether Saxon, Danish, Celtic or something more ancient still, can possibly be traced, the modern name sounds quite different from the original one. Dorchester for example was perhaps called Dorcot, and the Romans added the " chester " (a camp), as they did in the case of Silchester and of Manchester and other English towns, and so sent the Celtic root-name into the background.

We described in No. VI the situation of the " open fields " belonging to the Whitchurch village community. A good parish map, made at the time of the Enclosure Acts, 1800 and 1810 (see No. V) shows many interesting

old names of these fields, with their pightles, hitches, linches and lanes. Let us stroll over them for a while, in mind if not in body, and pick up what grains of information we can.

A large field not far from the recreation ground is divided into two parts by a line of trees, the remains of an old hedge; one part is known as "Clark's Pennick" and the other as "Whitfield's Pennick" (Clark and Whitfield having been small landowners about 1800). The old parish map shows that these were then parts of one of the great "open fields" called Pinnock's field. The name occurs as far back as the year 1220. Pinnock is a very old, as well as a modern, surname; and there is a village Pinnock in Gloucestershire and another St. Pinnock in Cornwall. Now observe, Pinnock is an old name for a hedge-sparrow, and the word is still so used in some parts of England. "Thus in the pinnock's nest the cuckoo lays," says Peter Pindar. It is also sometimes applied to the tom-tit. So you can form your own opinions whether Pinnock's field swarmed with the humble hedge-sparrow or the pert tom-tit, or whether the man after whom the field was called acquired this nickname because he resembled either of these familiar birds.

In favour of the latter view is the fact that other fields or parts of fields are named after persons. My learned friends agree that a certain Boza must have given his name to Bozedown field, and scoff at my suggestion that it may have had something to do with cattle, seeing that the old English word *bozman* means a *cowman*. The field was called Bozdon in an old vellum parish "terrier" (record of boundaries) of 1635; and it is spelt Bozdean and Bozedon in other documents. Old inhabitants point out which is Bozedown field

now; but I fear its actual position will in time be forgotten.

The adjoining great field, "Blackmore field," may mean black *moor* or black *pond*; *more* and *mere* being apparently interchangeable. But we may note here that Bleccesford (Black's ford) is mentioned as one of the very oldest boundary marks of the parish (about 1200) but I have no idea where the ford was.

"Great Binditch" and "Little Binditch" are fields included within the mound and ditch that formed the ancient British earthwork described in No. III. It is therefore more likely that Binditch means simply "within the ditch" than that it comes from the Danish word *by*, a *castle*, as suggested by Canon Slatter. The earthwork was made long before the Danish invasion.

Several fields are called "Hitch." There are "Great Hitch," "Little Hitch," "Lower Hitch," two simply called "The Hitch" and one in Park-field which is called "Powys's Hitch." In another parish map showing the fields on the Berkshire side which paid tithes to Whitchurch, is one in Sulham called "Hitching and Hop-Garden." In the open field system each large field was fallowed every second or third year, but sometimes a patch of the best ground in a field which should have been fallowed was ploughed and sown. This in Oxfordshire and Berkshire was called *hitching*. I suggest that this is the explanation of the word hitch, and that what we call catch crops were grown on the hitches or hitchings; but I do not get much support from the professional place-name-hunters.

Three lanes run from north to south over the upper fields. The most westerly, which is nameless on the map, developed into Mr. Palmer's drive, but at one time it seems to have reached the Hardwick road. The

old " Hatch Gate " public-house and smithy and a few cottages were on this lane near its upper end.

The next lane to the east, called " Hod's Lane," starts beyond Butler's Farm and ends near the furthest (north-east) corner of the British earthwork. Canon Slatter would persuade us that Hod was Odin, the chief god of the Norsemen ; but as Hod's Lane leads from two old enclosures called " Great Hod's " and " Hod's pightle," I lean towards a less poetical explanation and suggest that the original Hod, who perhaps filched the land from the community, was either Hodge, which is short for Roger, or Hood which sometimes stands for Richard. I do not forget, however, that a *hodland* was a *headland*, and that as the lane separated Pinnock's field from Blackmore field this may be the simple explanation after all.

The third lane, running from near Copyhold Farm and past Path Hill to the west lodge of Hardwick, is called " Town Lane." Where was the town ? *Town* —the Anglo-Saxon *tun*—used to be applied to quite unimportant places, for example, to Gatehamp*ton*. Indeed it originally meant a single homestead or farm enclosed within a hedge. In Wycliffe's Bible (about 1400) we find Matthew xxii. 5 translated : " But they despiseden and wenten forth, oon to his town, another to his merchandise." So we need not worry because there is no town for the lane to go to or from. The word *town* comes from " *tine*," which means a *twig* and was so applied to a hedge. " Tine-pit-pond " is the pond surrounded by a hedge. And the *tines* of a harrow or fork are simply *twigs*.

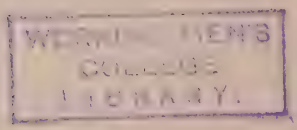
The road from the top of the hill to the Hatch Gate, which was the end of the road before 1800, has long been known as " Cobbler's Lane," a fact which must

be recorded without explanation. A small field adjacent to it was called " Cobbler's piece."

Hill-bottom in old documents is solemnly written " Hell-bottom " by the rector of the day, which is strange, seeing that " The Pit " is described as " bottomless " !

Such quaint ideas seem to have amused our ancestors, but to make up for it they gave the still more peculiar name of " Heaven's Pit " to the place where the " White House " now stands, but which was formerly occupied by some cottages. Possibly it was an ancient chalk pit. It seems to have been a sort of playground when our oldest villagers were children.

There are other curious and almost forgotten field names such as " Great Hammersley " and " Little Hammersley," which were perhaps the meadows of Hamer or Hammer ; and " Great Dern " and " Little Dern " of which I, at all events, can give no explanation ; and there are others which, like " The Gravels," explain themselves. There are also some named after men—once the life of the village—whose memory has long perished from the earth. They must remain unsung. We have already dawdled too long in the open fields, insomuch that a discussion of the other interesting place-names connected with Whitchurch must stand over till the April number.



XXV

APRIL 1923

PLACE-NAMES

No. 2

Oh, be some other name!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.
SHAKESPEARE.

MANY explanations have been given of the word "Coldharbour," but, though there are as many as seventy Coldharbours in the country, it is still undecided what the word really means. Most authorities now think that they were ruined houses (perhaps Roman, as so many are near Roman roads) where the belated traveller could obtain "cold comfort," that is, at least shelter when no inn was within reach. But the explanation is unsatisfactory. The neighbouring hamlet of Coldharbour, just beyond our parish boundary, is far away from any Roman road. And what about Coldharbour Lane in London?

No such doubt applies to "Collin's End." Colin, or Collin, is short for Nicholas and *End* was his seat, or place, or corner. The "ends of the earth" are the corners of the earth, not the ends of it. This use of the word is common in place-names, e.g., Ponder's End and Cane End (Cain's corner). The *end* of Coombe End is different; this merely means the end of the

coombe or valley. A *coomb* or *comb* is a bowl, or basin, or a dry measure (of four bushels of corn).

Let us now leave the high ground and go to the lower village noting, as we descend the hill, " the linches " (explained in No. VI) on the left, and " Park-field " on the right. It was so called before Coombe Park was dreamt of ; *park* being a very old word in many languages for an enclosed field. It is still so used in Scotland, only there they give it its proper Gaelic pronunciation " pairk."

The next place with a peculiar name is " Duchess Close." The tradition is that the impetuous Sarah Duchess of Marlborough used it as a half-way house between London and Blenheim palace ; but this is hard to believe, for Whitchurch was an inaccessible place in her day (1660–1744) with no bridge and very poor roads.

As we have already explained the meaning of the word Whitchurch (Witecerce—White church, see No. X), and, as far as possible, that of Walliscote, we may now go on to the river.

The parish boundary, after following the edge of Hart's Lock Wood, passes across the lowest of the group of islands to reach the Berkshire side of the stream. Hart's Lock and Hart's Cottage are called after someone named Hart. Several people of that name attended to other locks or weirs on the Thames at different times (see No. VII). John Bishop, writing in 1580, says our Hart's Lock was kept by Hugh Wysler, which reminds us first that the original Hart lived a long time ago, and secondly that the Whistler family acquired the Manor of Gatehampton about 1580. But the place must have been inhabited hundreds of years before the Harts came on the scene, for Roman coins have more than once been dug up near the cottage.

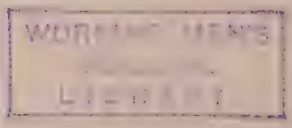
The parish boundary follows the Berkshire side of the river till it reaches the " Swan Inn " which it turns inland to include. We are therefore justified in inquiring into the meaning of the word " Pangbourne." In old days there was a man (or possibly a woman) named Pæga ; but it was pronounced almost like Pæya because the Anglo-Saxon *g* was soft. *Ing* occurs commonly in place-names and means sons or descendants of. Reading for example, was the home of the sons of Read—the red man. Pæinga-burna, then, means the stream of the sons of Pæga ; and the place and the stream are named after the person, and not, as might have been expected, the place after the stream.

There are many old " terriers," and descriptions of " perambulations " of the parish boundaries, excursions which must have afforded fine sporting days to the rector and sundry active men and boys, bursting through hedges and leaping ditches, cutting across private properties, rowing down the Thames and carving their marks on trees and stakes. The oldest known description of the boundaries of Whitchurch occurs in the *History of Abingdon Monastery* (about A.D. 1200). Unfortunately the places are unrecognizable. At all events we have failed so far to identify them. Perhaps some of our readers may be more ingenious. The boundaries were probably not exactly the same as they are to-day, and may have included a considerable area on the Berkshire side of the river. It runs thus " First from Bleccesford on Thames—along the boundary to the more southern landing place—from the more southern landing place to the head of Ceacca's spring—along the boundary to Beamster mere—from Beamster mere along the boundary to Headda's stile—from Headda's stile along the boundary to Leofrun's boundary—from Leofrun's boundary along

the boundary again to Bleccanford." All one can say about it is that Blecca or Blæcca was a personal name that probably meant black ; that Cæcca was another personal name, and that the man who owned it probably gave his name to Chackendon, that is Checkendon ; and that Headda was a man, perhaps a kinsman of the Headda whose sons lived in the village of Hedington. There is nothing to be said about Leofrun. Beamster has something to do with trees, but it is difficult to say what trees were reflected in Beamster mere.

How one would like to be able to form a true picture of these old fellows with their queer names Bosa, Blæcca, Headda, Pæga, Gār of Goring, and the rest. It is hard to visualize them, but they drove their teams of eight oxen over the linches and climbed up Whitchurch Hill and paddled about the river and felt quite as much masters of the situation as we do.

From what has been said it is obvious that, although a great deal is clear and undisputed about place-names, there is a very large number the interpretation of which is impossible or open to doubt. For this reason some interesting names in this parish have not been mentioned. Is it not rather consoling to think that no satisfactory explanation has hitherto been given of the names of the two outstanding physical features of this district—the Chiltern Hills and old Father Thames himself ? When Cæsar invaded Britain he said that the river was called Tamesis, and that is long enough ago, 55 B.C. ; and as to our noble hills, there was certainly a wooded desert called *Ciltinne* in this part of the world in very old days, but it is by no means certain that Chiltern and Ciltinne are the same word.



THE BOAT-HOUSE AND HART'S LOCK WOODS

XXVI

MAY 1923

THE BOAT-HOUSE

Fools build houses for wise men to live in.—PROVERB.

Sic vos non vobis.

THERE is no lack of familiar texts and proverbs to illustrate the following article. I make a present of it to any one in search of a subject for a sermon or moral discourse. "My" boat-house, for I still call it mine, near Hart's Lock, was built twenty-five years ago and I have occupied it for a quarter of an hour perhaps thirty or forty times a year—not more. For the rest of the days and nights it is at the disposal of beasts, birds, fishes, reptiles, insects, spiders, and molluscs which have adopted it as their home. There they live, year in year out, rent free, and recognize no claim for dilapidations.

After a flood, before the mud left on the staging has quite dried, many foot-prints may be seen. The largest are two or three inches long, not unlike those of a large dog, but with longer toe-marks. They are those of the otter. There is a sort of double pad-mark and impressions of only four of the five toes possessed by this attractive cousin of the weasels. There are no marks

of the claws and, as the toe-marks touch one another, no sign that the feet are webbed. In the spring we also see the foot-prints of the cubs, with a single pad and probably only three toes showing. The young otters—two to five in a family—are born in March or April, usually, it is said, on the Hart's Lock islands, but they swim down with their parents and amuse themselves in my boat-house. In the summer the otters make a good deal of mess on the staging, but that one can put up with. Mr. Barrett, of Hart's Cottage, has often seen them and is well acquainted with their whistle or bark ; he says they never kill the ducks, but that they will take young rabbits from their burrows. Otters are not particular about their diet. Of course they are fond of fish—and the best fish too. You may sometimes see a largish dace or a chub on the bank with a piece bitten out of the back near the head. The otter is a big beast three feet six inches or more from the tip of its whiskered snout to the tip of its great rudder of a tail. As they are shy and do us practically no harm here there is little fear that they will be exterminated by so-called sportsmen who hunt them with dogs and spears and have been known to boast of killing several in one day. There are otters at Hardwick and at Gatehampton, and many more up and down the river than most people suspect.

It is plain that every inch of the mud has been pattered over by the water-rat or water-vole. This is not a rat at all, but a first cousin of the short-tailed field-mouse or field-vole, which it resembles in having a blunt muzzle and a comparatively short tail. Its footprints often show only three impressions about half an inch long for three of its five toes, and two for the round pads which occur on the feet of mice and rats. I do not know what they

want in the boat-house, nor whether it is they or their objectionable relations the brown rats which gnaw the ropes, pull out the straw and build useless nests, in odd corners, of the long leaves of water plants and frayed rope. I accuse the brown rat, at all events, of spoiling the tackle, but perhaps that is because he is a hateful animal, and I know he frequents "my" boat-house. Rats are very plentiful this year and are doubtless attracted to that part of the river by the pig and poultry food. "We are murdered alive with them," say the farmers; and the presence of the live-stock makes it hard to know how to attack them. Rats kill everything they can, and eat anything, however foul. The female will breed before it is six months old, and as she may have four litters of eight to fourteen in a year, it does not need to have reached a high standard at school to see what an appalling number of great-great-great-grandchildren one mother rat may be accountable for, and how vigorous and incessant our attacks must be if we hope to prevail against these pestiferous and most undesirable aliens.

The friendly water-rat, on the other hand, does us no harm. It is a pure vegetarian. A modest litter of five or six in the late spring, and occasionally a second in October, is the limit of its yearly family. One feels as much pleasure in watching a water-rat sitting up like a squirrel and chewing a piece of reed, or swimming or diving, or threading its way amongst the water-plants on the bank, as one does disgust at the sight of the brown rat that has adopted the habits of the longshoreman and in some places has succeeded in ousting his more respectable relation.

We often see the water-rat, sometimes the brown rat, but I have never been lucky enough to catch sight of the

otter myself. I have watched for him ever so long in the boat-house in the middle of the morning, when he sometimes calls, though his usual visiting hours are much earlier or much later. As I sat quite still, reading a book, swallows darted in and out, Jenny-wren bustled about the roof, a stray sparrow looked in out of pure curiosity, and then, with a sudden flash of brilliant colour and a loudish whirr of its short wings, in flew the kingfisher. It settled first on one beam then on another, and after carefully inspecting me, unceremoniously took its departure. We know that it is a frequent visitor, almost a resident, in my hotel. White lines show where it perches on the horizontal parts of the woodwork, all ready to plunge in after some small fry or perhaps a minnow or even an eft or a tadpole. Comparatively few bird-lovers know of a fact which is familiar to the observant frequenters of boat-houses, namely that the kingfisher disgorges the indigestible part of his food—bones, scales, and so forth—in the form of pellets about the size of a rifle-bullet but rounded at both ends. They are beautiful white sparkling objects, but a puff of wind or a drop of rain shatters them into a white powder, such as may be seen outside or inside the long holes in a bank which the bird burrows out for its nest. I have, however, succeeded in preserving them by dropping a solution of gum-mastic in chloroform upon them from a camel-hair brush. Even then they are pretty fragile and it is doubtful if a specimen of one could be found in the South Kensington or any other Natural History Museum.

The swallow builds its saucer-shaped nest inside the boat-house upon the beams and ledges, and seriously damages the boat covers with its acrid droppings, suggesting thoughts of Tobit's blindness. The house-

martin prefers the outside, and places its cup-shaped nest with a side opening under the eaves. The sand-martin we can only see from the windows: its numerous nests are safe from all intruders in the sides of the railway cutting. There is generally a wren's nest in the thatch.

XXVII

JUNE 1923

THE BOAT-HOUSE AGAIN

When I look into a glass,
  Myself's my only care;
But I look into a pool
  For all the wonders there.

When I look into a glass,
  I see a fool;
But I see a wise man
  When I look into a pool.

W. H. DAVIES.

THE inhabitants of what may be called the basement of "my" boat-house are, at all events in summer, more numerous than those who occupy the other parts, from ground floor to roof. But most of them are so minute that it needs a microscope to see them. As for the larger ones, it is a case of "out of sight out of mind." They are as much out of mind as some other basement-dwellers. We scarcely notice the changing beauties of the reflections on the surface of the water, and who ever leans over the side of the boat and takes a long, long look into the forests of water-weeds waving their delicate leaves in the current, and the fishes swimming in and out amongst them? We are naturally less conscious of these things than of many

others above ground or water, which we see without looking, and hear without listening, but which pass into what the wiseacres call our subconscious or unconscious minds and perhaps break out in dreams that seem impossible to explain. We open the boat-house door and all we see is boats to be boarded as quickly as possible; so in and off we go. But let us pause for once and see what is to be seen in and beneath the water.

When this is not muddy after floods, or opaque from teeming life as it is in the spring, the habits and appearance of various fishes may be observed. One year a little school of perch settle in for the season, at other times dace and roach are more in evidence. Countless small fry find a more or less safe refuge in summer, and dart about amongst the less active tadpoles.

Meandering over the mud on the bottom are seen two sorts of tracks, one shorter and straighter than the other. They look as if some water-baby had been trying to sign his name with his thumbs. At the end of the shorter lines appear the tops of the shells of the fresh-water mussel (swan or pond mussel), a rather distant relation of the edible salt-water mussel. Half the shell is embedded in the mud and one would think that it never moved. But it does. It has a soft tongue-shaped "foot" which it can protrude from the end which is embedded in the mud, and with which it makes its slow perigrinations. The shells are not quite closed. Water is constantly being drawn in through an opening at the upper end. After passing over the gills it is conducted to the mouth, which is ready to receive whatever nourishment the bountiful current brings along. If you carefully insert the point of a boat-hook or a reed into the opening between the shells, the

mussel promptly closes them by means of some very strong muscles and you can pull it out and examine it. Economically it is of no value—not even for bait and certainly not for food. But even our poor freshwater mussel occasionally manufactures small pearls, as might almost be guessed from the lovely mother-of-pearly lining of the shells. These shells were once used to hold artists' colours, and mussel shells are still used as receptacles for gold and silver paint.

Another freshwater mussel nearly allied to ours, an inhabitant of rapidly flowing streams, produces pearls of small size in considerable quantities. In old days the Scottish pearl fishery was a lively and important trade and even as late as 1865, after its revival in the early part of last century, the take was worth £12,000. Not much goes on now, but on the west coast of Scotland you may see small urchins spending their days in collecting the pearl-bearing mussels in the mountain streams. Though we neglect this source of wealth it is otherwise with the thrifty Germans who continue to reap a pretty rich harvest from the streams of Saxony and Bavaria. It is strange that people should be willing to give such fabulous sums for pearls " of the first water," seeing that they can now be imitated so perfectly that it takes an expert to distinguish between the false and the true, and seeing also that a pearl is, after all, only the beautiful tomb in which the oyster or mussel has enclosed some foreign body—most often the embryo of a worm that had entered its home with malicious intent. But we may moralize to our heart's content, " pearls of great price " are as much sought after to-day as they were in the time of the Patriarch Job and probably long before his day, and it cannot be denied that they are objects of great beauty.

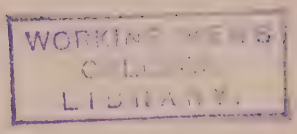
The long winding lines on the mud are made by water snails of which there are many different sorts, presenting great varieties of size and shape. Only the larger kinds are seen by the casual observer. They wander about in search of food or sometimes allow themselves to be floated away by the stream.

In early summer the mayfly grubs and their smaller cousins crawl out of the water by the million, and the perfect insects crack their cases and fly away for their few hours of happiness—if happiness it can be called; but the chief joy in connection with the "mayfly being up" seems to be divided between the fishes and the fishermen. The walls of the boat-house are then covered thickly over with these empty cases, amongst which is sometimes seen a larger one which once belonged to a dragon-fly. One may have been fortunate enough to see him crawl out of it and to watch his wings expand in the sunshine. Then he too sails away and embarks on a much more riotous life than falls to the lot of the mayflies.

Of all the many insects, spiders and their allies, that fly, creep, swim and spin their webs in "my" boat-house the most striking is the "old lady," or "great brown bar," a large dark night-moth that appears in late July. It measures nearly three inches from tip to tip of its wings. It is fond of coming into houses, where it hides during the day. It has a special affection for the cover of the punt, and when half a dozen of them are shaken out of it, and are blundering about, it looks as if a family of bats had suddenly taken wing.

About vegetation there is little to say. The boat-house is too dark even for the once detested American weed, and for the reeds and rushes which only get near enough to hinder the opening of the gates. A small,

dark moss grows feebly at and beneath the surface of the water, but that is all. There is a curious thing that looks like a plant, consisting of long pale-green, branched, finger-like processes that grow from the wood-work below the lowest low-water mark. But it is not a plant at all. It is the fresh-water sponge—one of the lowest forms of animal life. It may be seen on any of the few remaining locks with wooden piers, and if you pull off a piece to examine it and squeeze the water out of it you will be rewarded with an oozy but very disagreeable smell left upon your hand.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XXVIII

JULY 1923

THE GAMEKEEPER'S LARDER

I remember I once heard my Grandfather say,
That some sixty years since he was going that way,
When they show'd him the spot
Where the gibbet—was not—
On which Matcham's corse had been hung up to rot;
It had fallen down—but how long before, he'd forgot.
Ingoldsby Legends.

"THE gamekeeper's larder" is an old expression; so is "the gamekeeper's gibbet." Both are common in different parts of the country. The word larder is sometimes used for ladder, and "the ladder" is another name for a gibbet, so possibly those who coined the phrase "gamekeeper's larder" were thinking of the gallows-tree, not what we now call a larder, and certainly not of the original larder, which was a cool room for keeping lard or bacon in. Anyhow, the pitiful broken-necked corpses dangling from the gibbet are none too fresh, but rather remind us that within the last hundred years human corpses swung in clanking chains from gallows in exposed places like Inkpen Beacon. (The last public gibbeting occurred in 1832 at Leicester.) Let us therefore approach it from the windward side and see, without smelling them, who are the culprits—or shall we say victims?

There is no great variety. Of quadrupeds the Stoat, the Weasel and the Rat. The Mole has an executioner to himself and a gallows of special design, and the Hedgehog is seldom seen. Of birds, to place them in order of frequency, there are the Jay, the Kestrel, the Sparrow-hawk, the Magpie, the Little Owl, and sometimes a Rook and a Crow.

The land rat has other vices besides those mentioned before. The gamekeeper and the farmer hate it because it takes eggs and young birds. But it is an enemy of the whole human race. One of its worst faults is harbouring the rat-flea. For this flea is the " host " of the germ of that rightly dreaded disease, the plague. In insanitary countries like India and Egypt, it causes an enormous number of deaths. One form of the plague is contagious from man to man, but it is also conveyed by the rat-flea from rat to rat, rat to man, and man to man. The last epidemic of plague in this country was the " Plague of London " in 1666 ; but now and then cases occur near the seaports where plague-infected human beings and rats may get to shore unobserved. Medical officers of health are always on the watch for cases of plague, and deal with them and their " contacts " promptly and efficiently ; but the plague-infected rats may get away and are not infrequently found dying or dead in the Eastern counties. That is one reason why we should all try to exterminate the rat. From ancient times and in different lands the plague has been associated with rats and mice. We may recall the golden mice mentioned in 1 Sam. vi. 4, and many an old picture where rats are shown scampering over the poor wretches dying of the plague.

Little is heard in defence of the stoat and the weasel. They are blood-thirsty hunters, and seem to hunt and

kill for the pleasure of it. Thus they will pick out a particular mouse or rabbit and run it down with dogged perseverance. If they would confine their attention to "rats and mice and such small deer" they might be let off; and hereabouts we would not grudge them a few rabbits; but the keepers accuse them of taking any amount of young birds and eggs. They have a wide gape; and stoats, at all events, can easily carry pheasants' eggs unbroken to their cubs in the "bury." Considering how many are killed, it is a wonder they are not exterminated, for they are not remarkably prolific. Although the skins of stoats provide a valuable fur, they are mostly wasted in England, probably because the animals are "smelly." In Scotland and the north of Europe the stoat turns a pure or slightly creamy white in winter, except the black tip of its tail. Then it is called an ermine, and its pelt adorns the robes of potentates and kings.

Now as to "our brothers, the birds." No bird-lover can pass a gamekeeper's larder without a sigh. It goes to his heart to see the rows of lovely jays and magpies with their drooping heads and shrivelled eyes—"quite chap-fallen." But the gamekeeper has a different point of view, and it is admitted that both these birds take eggs and young game. Jays are killed in large numbers, but, as they are wary birds, many survive to enliven the woods with their harsh cries. We seldom see or hear a magpie now, and, if we do catch its merry chatter, it will probably be seen swinging next day upon the gibbet. It is a pity that this gay bird, which figures so largely in folk-lore and fable, should be utterly banished from our woods. I would plead for magpies being left alone when the rearing of young pheasants is over, for at other times they are useful to the farmer and harmless to the gamekeeper.

Of the two hawks the sparrow-hawk is far the more destructive, and as, so far, there seems no risk of its being exterminated by the ruthless persecution of game-keepers I will not plead in its defence. But the case of the kestrel is different. It should be considered from the point of view of the farmer as well as merely from that of the preserver of game. It is the farmer's friend for it feeds almost exclusively on mice, moles and beetles. Some ornithologists indeed acquit it of interfering with game preserves at all. On the other hand, there are the keepers, who are close observers and give us chapter and verse for particular acts of depredation, probably the work of an individual miscreant. So what is to be said except that, from the general point of view, there is strong evidence that kestrels do much more good than harm ?

The same may be said of the whole race of owls even that aggressive alien the little-owl. All owls, except the little-owl, are now protected in Oxfordshire all the year round, by order of the Secretary of State (1919). So we do not see them on the gibbet, except an occasional little-owl whose inquisitive nature has lead him to explore a drain-pipe rat-trap, when, of course, he has to take his chance. Owls are invaluable to the farmer, their food being chiefly rats and mice, small birds, beetles, a few frogs and perhaps a fish or two. The bad reputation they have acquired with gamekeepers is simply not supported by facts.

Lastly we come to the carrion crow and the rook. I am afraid the crow deserves the " black cap," but he is a wily customer and often eludes justice. His cousin the rook, too, has plenty of brains, but he is shot occasionally by the farmer and the gamekeeper, though more as a warning to his tribe than in the hope of exterminating

him. You might as well try to abolish original sin! And, even if it be granted that he may take an occasional egg, or chick, or dig up freshly sown maize, or stick his beak into a potato or a turnip, it must be allowed that he more than pays for this by the good he does in the destruction of grubs and insects.

But now it is time to leave the fragrant wayside gibbet. I cannot help looking at it more with the eye of the farmer and the lover of Nature than with that of the gamekeeper, though I grasp his hand as a good, if somewhat prejudiced, field naturalist and, in his own queer way, a lover of Nature too.

XXIX

AUGUST 1923

OUR MAMMALS

No. 1

Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth.—PSALM civ. 20.

OUR nearest relations in the animal world are the mammals, that is, animals which suckle their young. British mammals are all quadrupeds, and I, for one, have no desire to live amongst those sad-eyed caricatures of ourselves, the monkeys. It is enough for me to have shaken the long, cool, black hand of Sally, the late clever chimpanzee at the Zoo.

We can easily make a fairly complete list of our mammals of to-day, but it is impossible to say how many and how strange were those that frequented this particular neighbourhood in the long-forgotten yesterdays after England rose up out of the sea. The fossil remains of only a few of them have been found in the sands and gravels which were deposited on the top of the chalk by retreating seas, or rivers, or driving winds, or glaciers. Enough has been discovered, however, to show that during those thousands and thousands of years mammals were plentiful enough and some of them of huge size.

The following list of those whose fossil bones have actually been found in the neighbourhood of Reading was kindly supplied by the learned and obliging curator of the museum, Mr. Colyer. During the time the "drift gravels" were being deposited there were two kinds of elephants, one with straight tusks and the other the curly-tusked mammoth. There were also a hairy rhinoceros and a great hippopotamus, as well as a little horse, and the ancestors of our red deer and our modern cattle. These were hunted by our cave-dwelling ancestors (see No. III) who no doubt ate them, and trimmed their skins with those rough flint implements which have lasted better than their own or their victims' bones. In the later "alluvial and fresh-water deposits" (river ballast, etc.) are found the remains of the wolf and wild and domesticated dogs; also those of the beaver and the otter, a sheep and a goat, the roe and the fallow deer, the wild boar, and the Celtic ox with its long forehead and short horns.

There were certainly many other mammals both large and small whose remains have utterly perished. For instance there are no bones of the sabre-toothed tiger or the cave bear, and none of the smaller animals such as mice and bats. And yet we know that they were here; and evidence obtained elsewhere proves that bats at all events are very ancient creatures and that some species almost, if not quite, identical with those of the present day, flittered about such caves as Kent's Cavern at Torquay at the same time as the mammoths and hyenas and other animals long since extinct in this country inhabited them.

The bats, then, form a convenient link between the mammals of those old yesterdays and to-day. Of the fifty-four British land mammals (we need not consider

the whales and seals) probably thirty frequent this neighbourhood now, but it is safe to say that few of us have seen more than half of them. Here is the complete list. "*Chiroptera*" or *hand-winged :* ten kinds of bats. "*Insectivora*" or *insect-eating* (a poor name, for they eat all sorts of things): hedgehog, mole, common shrew, pygmy shrew. "*Rodents*" or *nibblers :* hare, rabbit, squirrel, dormouse, harvest-mouse, long-tailed field (or wood) mouse, house-mouse, brown rat, water vole (or water rat), short-tailed vole (or short-tailed field-mouse, or grass-mouse), bank vole. "*Carnivora*" or *flesh eaters :* weasel, stoat, fox, badger, otter.

This long list may be at once shortened by dealing with the ten possible sorts of bat all together. We say ten, because ten of the twelve recognized British species have been found in the caves at Henley and very likely come here sometimes. For ordinary people there are just two bats, the large and the small, or as they say in Berks, Bucks and Oxon, the "rat-bat" and the "mouse-bat"; and even that prince of naturalists, Gilbert White, only speaks of two varieties. As a matter of fact there are three largish bats; but the one we all know is the "noctule" which is seen high up at sunset amongst the swifts before they retire to roost, beating the air with its great wings, fourteen inches in their full expansion. Of the smaller bats the commonest perhaps is the "pipistrelle" or "common bat," but they are all so small and so elusive, and so difficult to keep in confinement that their habits and distribution are still imperfectly known.

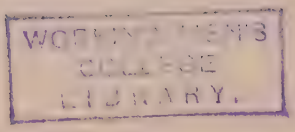
With their rather diabolical little faces, and some of them with such outrageously large ears, bats are uncannily like depraved human beings. The old monks must have had them in mind in carving their demons.

They gave them wings like bats' wings, which actually consist of delicate membranes extending along the sides from neck and arm to leg and tail, and stretched, like umbrellas, over the four elongated fingers, the hooked thumb being left free for the animal to hang by. Sometimes, perhaps attracted by the light, they come into our rooms and dart noiselessly about the ceilings and floors, and then up go the handkerchiefs over women's heads amidst general shrieks, because bats are (groundlessly) supposed to have a special affection for their hair. There is no more truth in the idea than in the myth that any English bats are blood-suckers like certain foreign vampires. Bats have only two teats and produce only a single young one, or at most two, at a birth. Unlike human babies, these precocious infants are born with minute teeth with which, as well as with their claws, they keep tight hold of their mothers' fur. Bats have very high-pitched voices so that few people can hear them after the age of forty, and some never hear them at all. By the same token the bats pay no attention to low notes but are attracted by high ones. Years ago, I remember, cruel boys in Whitchurch village used to kill them by swishing long flexible sticks backwards and forwards at sunset. Fishermen say they have killed them in the same way when casting flies, which may be truer than most anglers' tales.

Bats live on insects and have enormous appetites. They hibernate in cold weather more or less completely, but any warm, sunny day in the winter brings them out for an airing.

Two of our bats, "the greater and lesser horse-shoe" have a strange fleshy development of the nose, supposed to resemble a horse-shoe. The horse-shoe bats are exceptionally clever in avoiding objects in the dark, and

never take a window for an open space as other bats may do. It has been suggested that they have a sense we do not possess and the nature of which we cannot appreciate. Probably they are only compensated for their small eyes by an excessively high development of the senses of touch, hearing and smell; but the possibility of a sixth sense is an interesting subject for thought for those who are disposed to speculate upon the possibilities of an "unseen universe."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XXX

SEPTEMBER 1923

OUR MAMMALS

No. 2

The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft a-gley.

BURNS.

OUR mice—those that we catch in traps—include animals that differ from one another much more than we do from negroes ; it might almost be said than chalk from cheese. Shrew-mice, for example, are placed by naturalists amongst the *Insectivora* (insect-eaters) along with the hedgehog and the mole, far away from ordinary mice and rats. These *insectivora* are a low type of mammal, perhaps nearly related to the original mammalian stock. Their teeth are adapted for insect-eating, and most, if not all, eat insects more or less ; but moles are greedy for worms ; shrews like slugs ; and, as for the hedgehog, his strange taste for cockroaches is well known, and nothing comes amiss to him, not even eggs. I do not know if it is true that he sticks apples on to his prickles and so carries them away for cold-storage ; and I think he must be acquitted of milking the cows. The *insectivora* are, as a rule, hungry beasts. When sharp-set they will attack

any creature small enough for them to overcome, and perhaps all of them at times may condescend to a partially vegetable diet. Shrews, which are very pugnacious, eat their opponents when they kill them. The same may be said of moles. We lately found a young rat caught in a mole-trap, its hindquarters gnawed away by the indignant but lucky mole. A mole-run under a pheasant's or partridge's nest may let it down, but this does not prove that the mole has invented a patent egg-trap. While you must go out at or after dusk to see the hedgehog or hear him rustling amongst the leaves and whining, the mole, on the other hand, works by day and it is said by some to have certain definite hours for tunnelling about the fields, but this is denied by our experienced mole-catcher. The mole damages the young crops—of that there can be no doubt. We must charitably hope that he partly makes up for it by eating wireworms and grubs ; but there were no signs that he was helping us when the mangold fields were nearly ruined two years ago by the caterpillars of the " heart and dart " moth.

Three of our mice, the shrews, belong to this class of *insectivora*. The ordinary shrew and the pygmy shrew (the smallest of British mammals) we catch in our traps, but the water-shrew I know nothing about personally, not even if it frequents our river and ponds. Shrews are all much alike. Their long noses give them a quaint appearance like that of miniature tapirs. Their disagreeable smell is supposed to make cats and dogs dislike them, though owls will eat them. This odour probably suggested the absurd superstition that they may cause lameness, or even the death, of horses and cattle by running over them, and also made our credulous ancestors use dead shrews in some of the disgusting remedies

on which they pinned their faith as firmly as some of us do ours on the efficacy of ear-rings, hares' feet, anti-rheumatic rings and other useless charms. It is doubtful why cantankerous scolding women are called shrews; perhaps because shrews are such desperate and merciless fighters. But they are very delicate and easily die of shock or even contact with a hot hand. It is said that the mere sound of the snapping of a trap will kill them. Every autumn quantities of dead but apparently uninjured shrews are seen on roads and open places. It has been suggested that this mortality depends on bloodless fights, or perhaps on mere old age, for they are a short-lived race, and so it may be that the whole adult population perishes every year. If so, it is a fortunate thing, for they are extremely prolific and, in spite of the fact that they fall an easy prey to other animals, they are probably the most numerous of all the British mammals. Shrews are useful in the garden and seldom do us any harm.

The other mice are all *Rodents* (nibblers). The gentle dormouse—" the sleeper "—is not exactly a mouse and not quite a squirrel. In October he grows very fat, and, enviable mortal! casts care away, curls himself up in his nest, turns very cold, scarcely breathes, and sleeps well on into the spring, though a warm day will sometimes bring him out, tradition says, to nibble at a hoard of food which has been thoughtfully laid up within reach. Dormice are pretty animals, with their chestnut coats and bushy tails. They are seldom seen except by those who keep them as pets, for they come out chiefly at night to search for grain, or seeds, or leaf and flower buds, wild fruit, grubs, caterpillars, insects, the eggs of small birds, and, in the autumn, acorns and nuts which they open by making a neat round hole—not cutting

them across as a squirrel does. But you may sometimes see the greyish young ones as well as their parents creeping about the bushes if you have found the nursing nest, usually placed in a shrub a few feet from the ground. It is a round ball of grass without any apparent opening, in which the litter of about four is brought up. An investigating finger pushed into the nest may receive a sharp bite, though the dormouse as a rule is unaggressive and even affectionate. A pair of dormice once took lodgings in a robin's nest in a yew hedge in our garden, sleeping amongst the callow fledgings. You might find one mounting guard on the hedge while its mate was in the nest. Whether they thought of adopting the nest for their own when the robins had done with it, as dormice will sometimes do, or whether they had evil designs on the young robins when fat enough, we do not know. After ten days or a fortnight robins and dormice had all disappeared.

There are three other familiar mice—

1. The house-mouse, our dainty but troublesome fellow lodger, with its glossy fur and rather prominent naked ears, and its squeaks and scratchings and other well-known traits. It does fearful damage in ricks and granaries, more indeed than the rat. It is very prolific; and what can cats and traps do against an animal that has three to five large litters a year and has adopted the human house for its own and is distributed all over the inhabited globe?

2. The long-tailed field-mouse or wood-mouse, a well-known elegant little creature of which there are several varieties. Ours is rather larger than the house-mouse, with more prominent eyes and ears, of a redder brown colour above, and almost white beneath. It frequents woods, fields and gardens, where it crawls and leaps

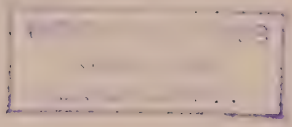
about the undergrowth, climbs to the tops of hedges and is a great nuisance when peas and other seeds have been sown; but it seldom enters houses or stacks. Its fertility is shocking—more than that of any other of our mice. One female in captivity produced thirty-six young ones in five months; but we must not argue from this as to what occurs in the wild state. Anyhow, in some seasons and some places there have been disastrous plagues of wood-mice and it is on account of such plagues that farmers and gardeners object to the wholesale destruction of kestrels and other so-called "vermin."

3. The grass-mouse or short-tailed field-mouse or field-vole which is not a true mouse and looks like its large cousin the water-rat. It is a rough little mouse, dark brown above and grey beneath, with a blunt nose, short ears, small beady eyes and a very short hairy tail (not scaly as in the true mice). This year, as often happens after a mild winter, they are very abundant. The fields and gardens are riddled with their holes. If you follow one down you find it leads by a circuitous route to a cavity about six inches across, sometimes bare, sometimes lined with grass, perhaps containing a crab-apple or some other food, and out of which a bolt-hole passes in another direction. These passages are said to be less complicated than those of wood-mice. The breeding nests, made of loosely woven grass are placed in shallow holes and are often exposed when the hay is mown. Nuts and other eatables are sometimes found alongside them. Grass-mice will take cheese [1] in a trap and devour the corpses of their comrades, but they prefer vegetable food. They eat grass to the roots, nip off flower-buds and kill saplings by peeling off the bark. They also are said to destroy

[1] He was doubtful about this afterwards.—J. M. G.

the nests of that particular humble-bee which, according to Darwin, is alone able to fertilize Dutch and red clover.

Two other mice must be mentioned. The bank-vole is like the short-tailed field-mouse but smaller and redder. I do not know whether it occurs here: and I must own the same ignorance about the charming little harvest-mouse, the smallest but one of British mammals. It frequents certain districts for a time and then leaves them. It builds a compact summer nest on corn-stalks or other plants, and in winter burrows in the ground or accompanies the house-mouse to the corn stacks and joins in its depredations. So when thrashing time comes round it should be easy to decide whether it is now one of *our* mammals or not.



OUR MAMMALS

No. 3

The merry brown hares came leaping
  Over the crest of the hill,
Where the clover and corn lay sleeping
  Under the moonlight still.

Leaping late and early,
  Till under their bite and their tread,
The swedes and the wheat and the barley
  Lay cankered and trampled and dead.

C. KINGSLEY.

THE word "free warren" is met with at least as long ago as 1250. In an old book, *The Hundred Rolls*, compiled in 1279, when Edward I was king, we read in the account of this hundred or district: "Item the lord of Witchurch holds a free and ancient warren in the same manor from a date of which there is no record." It might be supposed that this was a rabbit-warren, and that therefore the rabbit was an old inhabitant of Whitchurch. But no. The "warren," the "chase" or the "park" were "lesser franchises" included in the "highest franchise" which was the "forest"; and the "beasts of warren" were the hare,

the cony (i.e. rabbit), the pheasant, the partridge, the woodcock, the quail, the rail and the heron. So this teaches us nothing about the antiquity of the British rabbit and we might search in vain for an old rabbit-warren in this parish. As a matter of fact naturalists hold that our rabbit comes from Spain, and, though tradition says it was introduced by the Romans, it probably really invaded us about the same time as the Normans and for long afterwards was a rarity and a luxury. It was not plentiful till the thirteenth century. In the seventeenth it was still valuable for food and profitable on account of its skin, and it was only during the last century that its steady increase diminished its price and made it a public nuisance. At the present time, owing to the well-intentioned efforts of colonists and others, the British rabbit has spread to many parts of the habitable globe like an epidemic. In Australia it is an unmitigated pest in spite of organized campaigns for its destruction.

Cony is the old name for a rabbit, and lawyers call it cony still. The coney of the Bible, however, was not a rabbit at all but a " rock-badger." Only young rabbits were called rabbits by our ancestors, who used to eat them as a luxury at a rather disgustingly tender age. We had a prehistoric rabbit of sorts in England, but it disappeared during the " Ice Age."

Rabbits swarm in most parts of this district. They love the edges of woods, from which they creep out in the afternoon and gnaw the herbage to the bone. One rabbit-haunted spot familiar to generations of river-goers is the green bank at Hart's Lock where they browse and sport by hundreds at sunset. In spite of the abundance of woody refuges, some choose the open fields and even the hard chalk downs. The amount of material

shot out of these chalk burrows bears witness to the power of the rabbit's hind legs. This is so great that a mother rabbit has been seen to kick a weasel ten or fifteen yards downhill. Round their colonies thistles, nettles and annual seedlings replace the natural turf, and produce a rather squalid state of things. Rabbit-holes may be of enormous size, as can be seen in the belt of yews on the down near Gatehampton, where there is an old badger earth. They often lead to large underground villages with a motley population. A certain Col. Butler, while ferreting, bolted a fox, a cat, a stoat and several rabbits and rats out of one hole. These natural enemies living cheek by jowl in utter darkness and a tainted atmosphere suggest Fritz and Tommy in their trenches and dug-outs.

Rabbits do not stray far from their burrows and they make straight tracks for home when alarmed, their white scuts bobbing saucily as they bound along. But they go far enough to ruin a meadow. After a fall of snow at least every yard of a fifteen-acre field on this farm, half surrounded by woods, showed the spoors of rabbits and hares. Rabbits may be heard stamping with their hind feet as a warning or challenge, or whatever it may mean. The only other rabbit-sound one knows is the pitiful wail of terror when a weasel or stoat is in pursuit, or has fixed its skilful teeth into the neck of its prey.

We speak of the rabbit as mild and stupid: "the rabbit fondles his own harmless face"; but the hare—"poor honest puss"—is generally called timid. And so it is. Otherwise with its size and its teeth and its powerful hind legs, it would surely show some fight against its smaller enemies. As a rule it trusts altogether to its great speed, power of dodging, and endurance.

Barrett-Hamilton says a hare can travel on good ground thirty miles an hour, almost as fast as an average Derby winner. Unlike the rabbit which starts at full speed and soon tires, the hare lollops off slowly, husbands her strength, spurts when necessary, swerves like lightning, and can run for many miles. It takes a well-trained and swift dog to run down a hare, unless some lucky accident intervene.

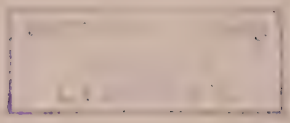
There are three British hares : the common or brown hare, the Scottish or blue hare, which turns white in winter, and the Irish hare. They are all ancient Britons, the brown being the latest arrival. Our hare is the brown hare. It differs from the rabbit in its brighter colour, larger size, shorter tail, and very much in its habits. For instance it does not burrow, but rests in natural hollows in the ground trodden smooth, which are called " forms " or " formes." In these the young are placed, and, like schoolboys, are moved from one form to another, to be out of harm's way. Leverets are furred at birth and much more developed than the helpless naked young rabbits, for which the mother burrows out a separate nest away from roystering bucks and other wild beasts. The hare goes far to graze, and its highways and by-ways score the fields like London streets. It is said that hares always tread the same spots and so these tracks are uneven. This, if true, is hard to make out on the downs, but some sign of it may perhaps be seen in meadows and cornfields. On the south side of Coombe Bottom is a series of parallel hare paths roughly twenty-two yards apart, running vertically, not horizontally, and no doubt marking the intervals between the " lands " when this field was last ploughed. It must have been hard work and suggests ploughing by oxen ; but old inhabitants say that it was

ploughed with three horses not more than forty years ago. Many recollect the last teams of draught oxen used hereabouts. They belonged to Mr. Hatt of Ipsden, who gave them up twenty-three years ago.

The chief mating season of the " mad march hare " is the spring, but leverets are met with all the year round. In favourable country like this, if not freely shot down, they become far too numerous, and, as it is, there are more than enough. Years ago it was common to see twenty or thirty at a time in " Park Field." They do sad damage to trees by barking them; and the farmer sees with disgust in frosty weather rows upon rows of swedes and mangolds—the product of his labour and his stand-by for the winter—completely eaten up by the hares, or winter-kale cut off by the stalk and lying uneaten on the ground. Of course he has his redress. The days are long past when hare-hunting was one of the principal sports and " the pursuit of the hare, fox and roebuck were accounted the three clamorous hunts." Moreover the harshness of the game-laws was greatly modified during the last century, and the " Ground-game Act " of 1880 gives the occupier " the right to kill and take hares and rabbits on the land," a right which he cannot legally part with whatever informal understanding may be come to between landlord and tenant.

Pages might be filled with an account of the " vulgar errors " and superstitions that have centred round the hare, which has from earliest times been considered a " wonderful little beast." Only one shall be mentioned. I have occasionally seen hares' feet worn as charms hung from the neck under the clothes. Within the last forty years in east Sussex a hare's foot was considered a potent charm against witchcraft, and a half belief in witchcraft still lingers, though it is just two hundred

years since a supposed witch was put to death in this country. From very ancient times hares and black cats have been associated with witches. It has been suggested that the saying " letting the cat out of the bag " is associated with an old German superstition that " you may obtain money from the devil by tying a black cat in a bag secured by ninety-nine knots and selling it to the fiend as a hare by a church door at midnight." There is no end to such queer stories. Most likely my patients wore their hares' feet as charms against rheumatism, for which the right fore foot was held to be excellent. The bone of a hare's foot carried on the person was said in Pepys's time to cure the colic and in fact almost all earthly ills. He wore one himself and refers to it four times in his diary. What a wonderful remedy ! And how cheap !



"THE LIBRARY," COOMBE END FARM

WORKING
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LIBRARY

OUR MAMMALS

No. 4

The fox barks not when he would steal the lamb.
SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN I was a boy we used to say "skuggy squirrel" and the word "scug" or "skug," which is probably of Scandinavian origin, is in common use here and in some other counties.

The squirrel is a rodent, as every child knows who has watched him sitting up and nibbling a dainty morsel, held in his funny little hands with their four long fingers and barely a trace of a thumb. As he is a day animal most of us must have seen him in the woods, where he is fairly plentiful. He attracts our notice by his bounding leaps on the ground, his scamper up a tree trunk, the knowing way in which he peers round it to see what you are about, the apparent scorn with which he swears and chatters when he thinks himself out of reach, and his rapid flight amongst the smaller branches as he springs from tree to tree. We note his big eyes, tufted ears and fanlike tail, rich red and bushy in winter, paler and thinner in summer, which serves as a rudder, a prop, a sail, a protection from cold and a flag of pride or challenge.

Essentially an inhabitant of the woods, the squirrel makes its " drey " or nest, rather like a magpie's without a roof, in a high tree, or else he chooses a hole in a hollow trunk for his home. But he wanders far away from the wood after food, and you may trace his paths, easily mistaken for rats' runs, leading towards a nut plantation, or his spoor upon the snow, for it is not true that he sleeps all the winter as the dormouse does.

Squirrels are easily tamed. Patient gentleness and plenty of nuts or acorns will entice them to your house. In fact they are general favourites, although they are destructive little beasts. Nuts are supposed to be their chief food, but they really feed largely on leaf-buds, young bark, acorns, beech-mast, sycamore seeds, fir-cones, and haws. They also eat plants, such as crocuses, and fruit, and in fact any succulent vegetable substance ; and they have a taste for animal food too, for example, birds' eggs and young birds. They have been caught in rat traps, and one has been seen gnawing a mutton-bone. Their worst crime is barking trees, which they may kill by stripping them all round. Whole plantations have thus been destroyed, and then the squirrels have to be ruthlessly shot. Normally they have few enemies except man, and, as there are two litters a year of one to six in the south of England, they increase fairly rapidly.

The American grey squirrel has been introduced in many places—fortunately not here yet. In this country it clearly thrives and may drive out our smaller red squirrel, which is a British speciality, though the common Continental squirrel is so like it as to lead to some confusion.

Those of us who are not fox-hunters seldom catch sight of Reynard, though there is ample evidence of his

presence in our fields. Sometimes he may be seen slinking along a hedge or amongst the furze-bushes, but it is not till all his " earths " have been stopped while he is out foraging at night that he has to fly for his life across open country in search of a refuge from his pursuers. Fox-hunting is not a very old sport. Fox-hounds of French or Spanish origin were not kept till the end of the seventeenth century ; it was only at the beginning of the eighteenth century that huntsmen followed with a pack of hounds, and as late as 1800 they had not yet thought of stopping the earths. In old days the fox was indeed a " beast of venery," but was spoken of with contempt as offering indifferent sport. It was then one man, one dog, one fox, trace him to his hole and dig him out. Now he is a glorious fellow, preserved from destruction till his hour strikes, notwithstanding the long faces of the poultry-farmer and the game-preserver. And when the stock of foxes gets low foreigners are introduced which may modify the colour of our British species.

The British fox is a handsome well-groomed gentleman with his red coat and white waistcoat. He seldom speaks except when courting in the month of February, but his short bark excites his noisy cousin the dog to fury. The cubs are born in April and the vixen is very bold in defending them. Hence perhaps the application of the name to some members of the fair sex.

> Oh ! when she's angry, she is keen and shrewd !
> She was a vixen, when she went to school ;
> And though she be but little, she is fierce.

The fox lives in burrows of his own making, or appropriates those of the rabbit or badger. He is far the most destructive of our wild animals, and, if it had not

been for the fox-hunter would probably long since have been exterminated like the wolf. The poultry-farmer, the gamekeeper, the huntsman and the rest of us know well what he likes best to eat and apparently to kill for mere sport, but it is rather surprising to hear that when hungry he will condescend to rats and mice, carrion of all kinds, frogs and worms, and even insects or crabs and whelks. Æsop hints that he eats grapes (if not too sour) and Solomon speaks of the " little foxes that spoil the vines," but I do not know whether English foxes eat fruit.

I know of no evidence of martens or polecats being met with in this neighbourhood in recent times. Our wild cats are only domestic cats that have escaped into the woods, the real savage wild-cat having been long ago banished to the remoter parts of Scotland. There is therefore only the badger or brock to deal with, but alas ! the Gatehampton badgers which used to roam about Whitchurch were exterminated last year—all except the old dog which is supposed to have escaped to Woodcote or some neighbouring colony. I say " alas ! " because it would be a pity if this interesting survivor of our native wild beasts were to be sacrificed to the pheasant. Formerly badgers were very common and gave their name to places such as Brockenhurst, and to people, for instance, Brock, the sculptor. Even now they are more plentiful than is generally supposed, and as they are rigidly protected in some places and their nocturnal habits shield them from observation, it may be hoped that they will not soon become extinct. They have their faults like the rest of us ; they steal eggs, but eggs are not their staple food. They eat roots, fungi, nuts, honey, wasp and bee grubs, frogs, snails and insects, in fact almost anything. On the whole they

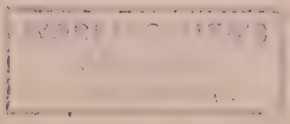
are harmless animals and if left alone mild-tempered. But when irritated (or badgered) they are very fierce, and as they are big and powerful (two and a half feet long, one foot high and thirty pounds in weight), with large teeth, and jaws that cannot be put out of joint, they are formidable antagonists for dogs or even men. It was because badgers are game fighters, and not on account of the harm they do, that the cruel sports of badger-baiting and badger-drawing were such favourites with our heartless ancestors. Bull-dogs were used for the purpose in England. In Germany the long bandy-legged dachshund was developed, which has gone out of fashion here since the war.

The best chance of seeing badgers is to hide near their burrows about sunset, when they come out and sometimes sport about like pigs before starting on their rounds. These rounds lead far afield. The spoor is characteristic, all five claws making marks as well as the palm, so to say, of the front foot but not the sole of the hind foot.

The best shaving-brushes are made of badger hair. The skins, mostly imported from abroad, are valuable for trimmings and formerly were used for pistol furniture.

Though not graceful like the fox, the badger is good-looking. "Grey as a badger" indicates the general colour, but his white face with the two deep black lines up the sides, white-tipped ears, black feet, and yellowish hairs on the belly, give him a striking, almost a handsome, appearance.

It is said that badgers cannot be tamed. Mr. Sellwood thought he had disproved this statement. He kept one, caught young, in a cage, and it followed him about like a dog. But one day the "call of the wild" was too strong, and it squeezed itself out through the window of a cellar in which it had been placed, and was seen no more.



XXXIII

DECEMBER 1923

SOME OF OUR BIRDS

No. 1

For a bird of the air shall carry the voice ; and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.—ECCLESIASTES x. 20.

NO less than two hundred and forty-two kinds of birds have been seen in Oxfordshire. A mere list of those which live in, or pass through, this parish would occupy a whole article. For besides our few acres of earth, we own the many miles of air above our heads, the lower few hundred feet of which are the highways and by-ways of the birds as well as of the deadly or commercial aeroplanes. Look up on a windy afternoon and you may see a flock of sea-gulls blown across the sky, which have either followed the Thames up from its mouth in search of food, or been driven inland by stormy weather in the channel. Often on a still night you may hear the cries of birds flying high up and very fast, perhaps wild-duck or moor-hen, or possibly the shriek of the stone-curlew or thick-knee which still haunts the downs about Moulsford. But, though the subject is too large to do more than glance at, we may profitably dwell upon a few of the less well-known facts about our birds which any untrained naturalist can

observe ; and, as sea-birds have been mentioned, we will start with them.

We are more than fifty miles from the coast at Portsmouth—the nearest point ; but every spring and autumn a few graceful terns or sea-swallows (probably the common tern and the black tern) spend a day or two hawking about the upper reaches of the Thames and feeding on the small fish. They look like large grey swallows with black heads and red beaks, but their flight is leisurely and more like that of a sea-gull. I have seen them mostly between Wallingford and Goring, but they come to Whitchurch occasionally. Both are summer visitors (May to October), and they come here soon after reaching, or just before leaving, England. The common tern is a sea-bird, but the black tern is not, and probably used to breed beside the swampy Thames and Kennet before these were kept within bounds by locks and weirs. It has been suggested that they follow very ancient lines of migration, perhaps dating from the time when the Chilterns ended in a sea cliff facing north-west.

The gulls seen hereabouts are mostly the black-headed or laughing gull, which for the last twenty or thirty years has invaded London in enormous numbers every winter, screaming and darting about the Thames Embankment to the delight of the crumb-throwers of all ages. As their heads turn white in winter they are not then very unlike the common gull, which with the herring-gull is our next most frequent winter visitor from the sea.

A less common and more striking bird is the great crested grebe which has been reported from Goring, but not, as far as I know, seen in our reaches. It seems to be steadily increasing in numbers in this country of late years. It is a near relation of the little grebe or dabchick, which is easily distinguished from the moor-hen

by its smaller size, dark chestnut colour, shrill musical note and incomparable powers of diving. Rather similar to these two is the common coot, so abundant on great ponds such as those at Fleet, but never seen here except in rather severe winters when the ponds are frozen. It is larger than the moor-hen, of a sooty-black colour, has a pale pink beak and a bare white place on the forehead which accounts for its being called "the bald-faced coot." In old days coot were so plentiful and so much valued for food that ponds were described as containing so many acres of coot. Even now coot-shooting in Southampton Water is considered a "sport"; but from all accounts, the flesh needs elaborate treatment to make it palatable. A roasted moor-hen, however, I have found quite acceptable after a hard morning's rowing.

Nearly allied to these birds are the water-crake and the corn-crake or land-rail. A few years ago the corn-crake was common enough, but it has become scarce, and now, except occasionally near the river, we seldom hear its strange note resembling the sound produced by passing a knife along the points of the teeth of a comb. Gamekeepers suggest that hawks are responsible for the disappearance of the corn-crake, but "any rope will do to hang a dog," as the saying is, and the hawks' responsibility in this case is more than doubtful, for the corn-crake, unlike the pattern child, is oftener heard than seen. Either it is a perfect ventriloquist or else it moves with lightning speed. You cautiously steal towards the spot from which the dry "creak creak" seems to be coming, till you fancy you are almost treading on the bird, but lo! after a moment's silence a faint "creak creak" sounds out jibingly a hundred yards away.

The common hawks have been dealt with in previous numbers. Some of the rarer hawks and falcons visit us

occasionally. The smaller species are hardly to be distinguished by the ordinary observer, but the large peregrine falcon, which sometimes follows the flights of wood-pigeons on their winter southward migration, would be sure to attract attention. A fine hen peregrine was shot near Stapnell's farm, together with the pigeon at which she was "stooping." She measured nineteen inches in length of body, whereas thirteen inches is the average length of a kestrel, and the span of her wings was over two feet. It is a pity to kill this noble bird, though the temptation must be strong when a pair take to a diet of homing (carrier) pigeons as was lately the case on Great Orme's Head in Wales.

Something has already been said about owls. We have the white barn-owl, the brown or tawny owl which says "tu-whit, tu-who," the long-eared owl and the little-owl.

The little-owl supplies food for thought. It is common abroad; but misguided attempts to naturalize it in England only proved successful towards the end of last century. Since then it has multiplied like the Australian rabbit and threatens to oust its aristocratic British relations. It is like the struggle between brown and black rats, grey and red squirrels and, alas! between white man and the red Indian. We could do well without the little-owl, whose misdeeds lower the character of the whole tribe.[1]

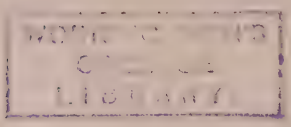
A barn-owl which nests in a hollow pollard wych-elm at Coombe End lately blundered down the chimney and laid an egg in the harness-room. Before this mishap two eggs had been washed by a rainstorm down the hollow tree, where they lay amongst a heap of "casts." Later two more eggs met the same fate. Five eggs is an

[1] See recantation of this in No. XXXVI.—J. M. G.

average clutch, nevertheless the owls stuck to their old abode and their blood-curdling shriek about dusk from the centre of the old tree was still to be heard. No wonder that countless superstitions have gathered round this doleful note.

> Now stole upon the time the dead of night,
> When heavy sleep had closed up mortal eyes ;
> No comfortable star did lend his light,
> No noise but owls' and wolves' death-boding cries.

The owl was a bird of evil omen to the ancients. In the Bible it is associated with dragons and solitary wildernesses, and I myself knew a credulous mother who thought an owl coming down the chimney gave her boy the mumps ! But it looks so solemn with its great staring eyes that the Greeks held it sacred to Athene their goddess of wisdom, and it is to-day the mascot of the learned Athenæum club in London. Then there is the mystery of its silent flight, depending on a special formation of its feathers ; and as we see a barn-owl skimming noiselessly over the meadows after sunset, we call it ghostlike without perhaps thinking very accurately what the word ghostlike really conveys to us.



XXXIV

JANUARY 1924

SOME OF OUR BIRDS

No. 2

O melancholy Bird, a winter's day
Thou standest by the margin of the pool
And taught by God, dost thy whole being school
To Patience, which all evil can allay.

HOVELL-THURLOE.

ONE of the most striking river-birds is the Heron (the "mollerne" or "moll-erne" or "molly heron" of these parts), whether it be seen with head tucked back and legs stretched out slowly flapping its great wings (perhaps six feet in the stretch, though the bird only weighs three or four pounds) as it shifts its position on the bank, or high in air uttering its loud short trumpeting croak on its way to or from its distant home. Herons travel far to their feeding grounds, at all events between very early spring and August, when they are busy at the heronries. The nearest heronry to us is at Coley Park, Reading, the home of the Vachell family from 1309 to 1705. The herons, probably at least as ancient inhabitants, still stick to their home in spite of the railway and the crowded suburb which almost surrounds them. They are as conservative as

the rooks which still build in some of the populous parts of London.

A heronry in spring is a strange sight. The nests, like large rooks' nests, are usually placed at the tops of high trees, and the old birds will be seen either standing upright on them feeding their young, or sailing round inspecting any intruder. In the excitement of bringing up a family there fall to the ground egg-shells, a few young birds, and plenty of fish, which can be appropriated by human neighbours if they care for coarse fish. Not that herons confine themselves to coarse fish : they will take trout and also eels, pike, young water-fowl, water-rats, field-mice, worms, frogs, insects and other small water-dainties.

The heron is a beautiful bird. It has an almost dandified appearance with its grey coat, white plumy waistcoat and blue-black waving crest. And it may well be taken as the type of patience as it stands stock-still on the bank or in the water—perhaps on one leg—with head thrown back, but watchful eye, ready to spike an unsuspecting frog or eel with a lightning stab of its powerful beak.

It is amusing to watch rooks chevying herons as they often do. It reminds us that both these birds were hunted with hawks in the old days, when falconry was in high favour with the aristocracy and gentry. This very ancient sport which seems to have been practised by the Chinese two thousand years B.C., and in other eastern countries from remote antiquity, was in fashion in England from Saxon times till the end of the seventeenth century, and even now is followed by some old-fashioned enthusiasts. The peregrine falcon was most prized for hawking in this country and no one below the rank of an earl was allowed to use one. It

was far the best for killing herons, and when killed we must suppose that they were eaten, if we are to judge from the pictures of herons on dishes borne aloft on the shoulders of waiting men.

The Thames swan is the " mute " or " tame " swan, a native of Sweden, Denmark and some more eastern countries. With us it is a half-domesticated bird, which tradition says was brought to England from Cyprus by Richard I. It is easily distinguished from the two wild English swans, the " Hooper " and " Bewick's "—which we never see here—by the very becoming black knob or " berry " just above the beak, as well as by the graceful way in which it swims with neck curved backwards, and wings set like sails. Wild swans migrate in large flocks and breed in the far north, but tame swans, after pairing for life, choose a comfortable permanent home. Ours nest on the Hart's Lock islands. This is not to say that migrants never reach us from abroad or that no tame swans ever leave our shores ; but, if they do, it must be in small numbers. There are about six hundred Thames swans, most of which belong to the King, but a few of them to two London City Companies, the Vintners and the Dyers. It is thought that about twelve stranger swans settle in the river every year and about twenty river swans escape. There are about a hundred more now than there were twenty years ago. In July or August the young swans are marked by nicking the beak, and pinioned ; this is called " upping " or " hopping."

Sometimes you are suddenly startled by a terrific flapping of wings, as a swan, with apparent difficulty, rises from the water ; but once up, it stretches out its long neck and flies with great speed, the beating of the wings making a loud whistling sound. They seldom

fly beyond the reaches over which each pair claims exclusive rights. Trespassing on these is resented and may be followed by a bloody battle. It is said that a year or two ago, after such a contest, the below-lock swans robbed those living above the lock of some of their offspring. Though usually mild-tempered even river-swans may be dangerous in the breeding season ; a stroke of the wing will break a man's arm. The tame swan is not really quite mute, for cygnets have a feeble whistle and adults make a short grunting noise, especially in the spring, and hiss like a goose when angry. They are easily appeased by bread or cake, although their natural food is river-weeds and grass with perhaps a few insects and grubs.

Formerly swans were much esteemed as table birds and large numbers were bred for food. They were served roasted or in a pie. " A fat swan loved he best of any rost " says Chaucer. Cygnets when fattened are said to be very good eating ; but swan in any form is seldom seen now even at the most extravagant banquets.

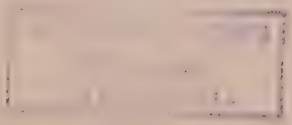
The only large swannery remaining in England is at Abbotsbury in Dorsetshire—near Chesil Bank, the haunt of tern and other sea fowl. Seven hundred or more can be kept there at a time and it is well worth a visit.

Their spotless whiteness is enshrined in many poetical and fanciful legends. They are the emblems of virgin purity and it is said that no Irishman would own to having shot one ! Imagine then the shock experienced by Dutch explorers who in 1697 first saw the Australian black swan. Such a portent seemed against Nature. There are some black swans belonging to the Vintners' Company above Goring and occasionally they stray into our waters. They are beautiful birds, their silky black costume being set off by just the hint of a white petticoat

and a piece of white ribbon round their crimson beaks. Like some other aliens they multiply fast, and may get the mastery over their larger white relations. Farmers complain that they eat too much grass, in consequence of which large numbers have been destroyed.

Amongst the warblers that reach us in the spring three are very similar in appearance—the chiff-chaff, the willow-wren and the wood-wren. The wood-wren is the largest of the three and the latest to arrive. It is also the least common. In fact it is not a very common bird, but it is always to be heard in our beechwoods and may be recognized by its two or more melodious whistles and a very characteristic rippling sound that has been likened to the noise of a stone thrown along the ice, or to a long-drawn-out fairy " hip-hip-hip hooray."

There is nothing special to be said about the other birds of this district ; they are just ordinary individuals like ourselves. Reference shall therefore only be made to a weird sound often heard in the woods. It is caused by blows on the bark of hollow trees delivered with extraordinary rapidity by the beak of the greater and the lesser spotted woodpecker. The rattle made by the two birds is not precisely the same. That of the lesser spotted is said to be the more prolonged. The sound, which, though supposed to be a sort of call note between the sexes, is heard from December onwards, is made high up in the trees and carries a long distance. Both birds are shy, and not very vocal, in both respects differing from their gay relation the green woodpecker or " yaffle," which hunts for ant-grubs on our lawns and cheers us with his " shrilly laughter." Nevertheless, this year a greater spotted woodpecker confidingly haunts the parsonage garden and a lesser spotted has nested close to the house of a noted lover of birds at Checkendon.



XXXV

FEBRUARY 1924

FOOTPRINTS

Hast thou entered the treasuries of the snow ?—Job xxxviii. 22.

PEOPLE talk about "horse-sense," a term not found in the dictionary, meaning a sort of exaggerated, unreasoning, but irresistible common sense. It is difficult to imagine why ; unless it be because of the solemn look of a horse's long face (which by the way has given rise to another and a better expression "horse-faced "). Notwithstanding its many noble and useful qualities, no animal flies into such a state of mad panic at trifles as the horse, and few are subject to such fits of senseless perverseness.

It is "dog-sense" that I envy. Not merely the dog's uncommon-sense and its faculty of entering into devoted companionship with its human friends, but those highly developed senses—particularly that of smell, which open up to it a world of which we are completely unconscious. Your dog when he accompanies you on a walk does not perhaps enjoy the beauty of the landscape, or admire the wonders of the heavens, but how much more than his master he knows about what is happening at the moment and also of what has occurred some time before ; and as far as the immediate surroundings are

HARDWICK AND MAPLEDURHAM, FROM WHITCHURCH

From aquatint after J. Farington, 1793

concerned he smells much more than his master can see. It is humiliating to hear that most savages have this sense, as well as the power of interpreting what they see, far more highly developed than we have. If we pleased we could revive these dormant faculties to some extent by much practice, as the blind do, making their senses of smell, hearing and touch more acute than other people's. In the London streets I have sometimes shut my eyes when the way was clear and tried how many shops I could detect by their smell as I passed. It was surprising to find how much knowledge you unconsciously gain in this way. The stars are visible to some eyes in daylight, and it is said that anyone can see them after sunrise if he looks up at the sky from the bottom of a well.

These thoughts were suggested by a recent walk in the snow. From what is printed on a sheet of snow one can learn by sight much that the dog appreciates year in year out by the sense of smell. After noting the small birds' footprints in the garden where they had gathered round their morning dole of crumbs—the long hops of the blackbird and thrush, the shorter hops of the sparrow, the still shorter ones of the chaffinch and the tripping walk of the hedge-sparrow, I followed the path down our coombe. Here there were many tracks of rabbits and hares, which differ only in size of the footmarks and length of stride. They are worth studying. There is an old saying " put your best foot foremost." It is strangely inapplicable to a human being, but is always practised by rabbits and hares. When they are sitting the hind legs make two long marks in the snow, between which are the small round impressions of the fore feet, either side by side or one slightly in front of the other. When they begin to move, the

marks of the hind legs are shorter because the animal now puts only its paws to the ground, and they are advanced *in front* of those of the fore feet; and the faster the speed the further the marks of the hind feet reach in front of those of the fore feet. The latter are so close together that they often make only one mark so that the whole result is a triangle, longer or shorter according to the pace at which the animal is moving. This illustrates what photographs of coursed hares plainly show, that, when at full speed, mighty leaps, almost like those of a kangaroo, are made with the hind legs, while the front legs lie against the body and are chiefly used for steadying purposes.

It was interesting to see how they followed human paths as well as their own much-trodden highways (see No. XXXI) and how they had scraped away the snow in search of food. Later on I saw tracks leading to gnawed willow branches by the river, and gnawed roots and stems of a spindle tree and of great beech trees in the woods, and in one meadow signs that they had trooped from all sides to a heap of kale thrown out for the cows and half covered by snow.

As my path approached a belt of trees, signs of pheasants began to appear, and on the other side were some large footprints which from a distance I hoped might turn out to be those of the badger, but they were only the round marks made by the gamekeeper's two dogs. His own footmarks nearby soon showed in which direction he and they had been walking. There was no sign of the badgers anywhere, though I afterwards skirted the bank of yews where they used to live. Probably they were snug in their earth.

At Coombe Bottom a different track appeared, the footmarks being not unlike those of a dog but smaller

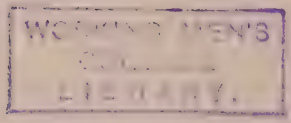
and of more oval shape and placed almost exactly one behind the other in a straight line. They were those of the fox. I traced him up the steep slope on which the old target used to be, to a colony of rabbits whose burrows he had evidently thoroughly explored; he had then passed up, perhaps with a rabbit in his mouth, to the corner of the wood, where the track was lost amongst the dead leaves.

So I went on towards the river. Near the piggeries are the characteristic tracks of rats attracted by the food; the footmarks are not unlike those of birds, but are easily distinguished by the long line made by the tail dragging along the ground. There were no other footmarks on the bank, but land-rats, water-rats and pheasants had been busy; so had the moor-hen whose huge footprints look some sizes too large for so small a bird. Above the islands was the rather unusual sight of a flock of sixteen pochard which rose as I approached, but there was no sign that either they or the mallard or dabchick or other wild-fowl had been walking on the bank. The flat meadows on the Berkshire side are better places for investigating their spoors.

The close of a short winter afternoon put a stop to further inquiry and the investigation of the partridge tracks in the stubble fields had to stand over till next morning. Their delicate little footmarks show how far they run or walk along the lines between the drills and how they turn aside in little companies and scratch through the snow in search of food, but I failed to find signs of night resting-places, which are so obvious when there is no snow, and show that they sit in a circle face outwards on guard against the approach of enemies. Perhaps in snow time they sleep in the woods and under hedges.

Such are some of the innocent pleasures to be enjoyed on a winter's day. Now the mild west wind and the warm rain have melted all the snow, and if we retrace our steps we have very little chance of learning about the nocturnal adventures of the wild beasts and birds, though our dog in a more or less indefinite way can appreciate them still.

It seems as if our ramble should point a moral, but, if there be one, I will leave my readers each to draw his own ; only adding that if we really look at what we see, listen to what we hear and attend to what we smell, we shall gain a heap of useful knowledge which is hidden from ordinary unobservant mortals.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XXXVI

MARCH 1924

OWLS, GULLS AND LEECHES

He with a smile did then his words repeat;
And said, that, gathering Leeches, far and wide
He travelled; stirring thus about his feet
The waters of the Pools where they abide.
"Once I could meet with them on every side;
But they have dwindled long by slow decay;
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may."
WORDSWORTH.

MY December article led to an interesting correspondence of which, at the risk of being dubbed a bore by those who do not care about natural history, I now submit some extracts for your perusal. First came a friendly attack upon me from Miss Gulielma Lister for "joining in the foolish, ignorant outcry about the Little Owl," telling of "barrow-loads of its mouse and beetle pellets collected at Chingford and in Worcestershire," and adding that it is only in a few districts that they have increased to such numbers as "to trouble your precious game preservers." I was obliged to own, with shame, that I have no *direct* evidence of their evil habits, and we know that gamekeepers' evidence is always called "tainted" by ornithologists. I was then referred to Dr. Collinge's observations on the contents of the stomachs of ninety-six Little Owls (two killed in

May, thirty-nine in June and fifty-three in July, 1922) from twenty-seven estates in Hampshire. Insects, earthworms, voles and mice accounted for 85·33 per cent. of what was collected; 2·94 per cent. consisted of birds, mostly house-sparrows, and only 1·78 per cent. of game-birds and poultry. He concludes that "the Little Owl is a most valuable ally."

Then came a reference to what Mr. Coward says in *British Birds*. "The gamekeeper accuses it of destroying game and their eggs, but though a diurnal feeder cannot be expected to refuse an occasional pheasant or partridge chick, examination of its pellets reveals no serious crime." He adds, however, that too much must not be said in praise of its beetle-destroying habits, because many of the beetles it is so fond of are invaluable in making away with carrion and dung.

Inquiry of Mr. Wallis, of Reading, brought further information. He raised the question at the Ornithological Club, where it has been often more or less hotly debated. The average opinion seems to be that while many Little Owls are insect and mouse eaters, some are bird eaters. "It undoubtedly does destroy young largish birds," he says, "viz. a three-parts grown woodpigeon taken from nest. Also young partridges, and when a Little Owl has found a brood of young birds it will take one or two daily." He sums up the matter by saying "the more reasonable men agree that *all* owls—White and Little, too, are subject to break away, and that, as with Kestrels and *Barn* owls which are notoriously and almost absolutely harmless, but of which now and again an 'aberrant' *does* rob the pheasant coops, so with Little Owls."

In point of fact, it seems that the game-killers, like human criminals, are the exceptions. And as in the

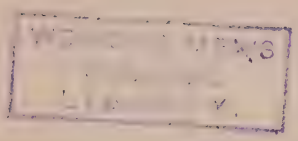
case of human beings, we cannot say that the majority are possessed of all the virtues, so on the other hand it would be unfair to condemn the whole race because a certain number of us are cannibals.

A fellow student of mine who lives at Appledore near the Romney Marsh simply says that the Little Owl is a most destructive bird and far too common there; but then he is a sportsman. He goes on to add some interesting facts about the Black-headed Gull, which it will be remembered is one of our winter visitors. Let us follow it into Kent on its summer migration, and hear what Dr. Cock says. "The Black-headed Gulls, or Kips as we call them, nest at Dungeness in the 'Open Pits,' two large ponds of brackish water in the beach. In the old times their nests were the source of a large proportion of the leeches sent to London. A boat was brought on a cart across the beach from the shore and the nests which were partly floating, turned up and the leeches put into jars. Thousands of 'em. The eggs were sold in Town as plovers' which they strongly resemble, being but little larger [but less pointed]. I remember being told that one man sent up 3,000 of them. The leeches were in evidence when I was a big lad, just joined University College Hospital. We had a picnic and some of the girls took off their shoes and stockings and waded into the water on the Pit edge to get the buckbean or water gentian. One gave a howl and rushed out with two fat leeches attached to her calf. I remembered hearing my father say that salt made them disgorge, so I put some on their heads and they promptly dropped off."

There are plenty of small leeches, perhaps six different sorts, in our ponds and in the river; and their orange egg cases may be found on the under surfaces of water-

lily leaves. The medicinal leech is not found. I do not know about the larger horse-leech, which is four inches long and according to the Book of Proverbs is never satisfied: "The horse-leech hath two daughters crying, Give, give." It is not, as is commonly supposed, a blood-sucker, but lives chiefly on worms. The medicinal leech is an inch shorter and is less common in Britain than on the Continent. Millions of them used to be caught in Germany and France not so long ago. Some of the leech-gatherers used to walk barefoot into the ponds and let the creatures fix on their legs, others drove old horses or cattle into the water for the purpose. They are not so much used now, but in my youth every chemist had a stock of them and at the hospital they were, and are still, kept in the dispensary covered up in a jar of water, and sometimes they used to escape. Applying leeches was quite an art, but a nasty job and an anxious one when we had to get them right end up into glass tubes made on purpose and put them, say, upon an inflamed gum. The trouble is that they have a sucker at each end, though only one is used for sucking with. It is rather disgusting, too, to think of making a sort of worm suck one's blood, but it is a painless way of bleeding. Lots of rules were laid down as to how and when they were to be applied. Each leech is supposed to be able to draw a teaspoonful and a half of blood, but listen to what a very great French surgeon, Ambroise Parè, writing in 1579, has to say upon the matter. "If the leeches bee handled with the bare hand, they are angred, and becom so stomachful, as that they will not bite; wherefore you shall hold them in a white and clean linnen cloth, and applie them to the skin, beeing lightly scarified, or besmeared with the blood of some other creature; for thus they will take hold of the flesh,

together with the skin more greedily and fully. To cause them fall off, you shall put some powder of aloes, salt or ashes upon their heads. . . . If you desire they should suck more blood than they are able to contain, cut off their tails as they suck, for thus they will make no end of sucking, for that it run's out as they suck it." Like Baron Munchausen's horse that never stopped drinking when it had been cut in two; or the front part of a wasp that will go on eating after the body has been removed; or inattentive folk who can read the same book over and over for ever and a day and still find it fresh.



XXXVII

APRIL 1924

MISCHIEVOUS BIRDS

And the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.—MARK iv. 4.

NEVER have I seen such a raid on the young wheat as was made last November and December by the starlings. They came in thousands just as the tiny green blades were showing above the ground, and the round holes made by their beaks in the line of the drills were often twelve or more to the foot. A good many were shot. They were in fine plump condition. Their beaks were stuffed with earth and young wheat shoots; their gizzards contained anything up to thirty wheat grains mixed with other vegetable matter and the small snails, slugs and grubs which form the staple diet of the starling for most of the year. Each stomachful represents one meal. They were busy almost all day, but they visited our fields chiefly in the early morning and the late afternoon. It is fair to suppose that each bird swallowed an average of forty grains a day. Each grain might tiller out into four or five stalks, so the loss in yield must be enormous. Not that every plant is necessarily destroyed; the foodstuff stored in the grain only supplies temporary nourishment and, if the rootlets are strong enough by the time it is attacked, the starling can nip off the grain

and leave the tender plant, in a sadly exposed position indeed but still alive and able to grow up from the bottom of the hole dug by the bird's beak. When the plant is well established it ceases to interest the starlings; they seem to know that the grain is shrivelled and done for. That is one reason why the farmer likes a warm germinating season. Last year's harvest was early, but owing to the wet autumn the wheat was not sown till November. Then followed frosts, so that in the second week of December the drills were barely visible. Healthy plants were then two and a half inches long; those robbed of their grain varied from three-quarters to half an inch long and were very feeble. Many of these looked as if they could not possibly recover and many had been pulled up and were lying loose upon the surface. What with the starlings and the prolonged winter the field has a most unpromising appearance at the present time.

The case against the starling in the corn-fields is thus unanswerable, and I am afraid it is equally strong as regards fruit trees, but these are as a rule easier to protect. It is a pity that the starling is so mischievous because, though dirty in its habits, it is a beautiful and amusing bird. It is a picture of irresponsible gaiety perched on a chimney-pot in the spring, puffing out its throat, flapping its wings, whistling and squeaking and rattling like a knife-machine. It is an excellent mimic and sometimes gives you an impressionist idea of the combined noises of the whole farm-yard. Then in what a friendly way the starlings cluster in myriads in the tall trees about our houses at sunset discussing at the tops of their voices domestic questions or affairs of state before starting on their wondrous manœuvres in the air, which end in a sudden plunge into the larch

woods. I could better bear their robberies if the winter thieves were our summer friends, but all starlings have a tendency to move south and west in the autumn and north and east in the spring, so possibly the birds that breed here spend the winter in Spain or Africa and our corn-thieves may have come from Norway and Sweden, where oats are the best corn they are likely to find.

Amongst them as they ply their evil trade you may often see a rook or two ; but a shot fired amongst rooks will often clear them off for the day, though it produces little effect upon the starlings. Maize is what rooks cannot resist, and they simply play the mischief with it. You are advised to sow five times as many grains as you need plants—one for yourself, one for the rooks, and I forget what becomes of the other three.

Now the rooks resort to the few remaining swedes in search of the minute yellow grub which occupies the centre of those large lumps commonly seen on swedes and turnips. The rooks dig much deeper than the grubs ever burrow and often hollow out the root completely.

No doubt rooks and starlings have become much too common and correspondingly more mischievous. Their numbers should be systematically reduced and then they could do little but good to the farmer.

Other birds that damage the young corn are pheasants and partridges. They both, but especially the pheasants, scratch like chickens, and a soft powdery seed bed is specially attractive for making their dust-baths in which they revel like barn-door fowl. They may be forgiven on account of the good they do by devouring all sorts of grubs ; and besides, if the truth be told, they may well plead that they have a grudge of their own against human beings.

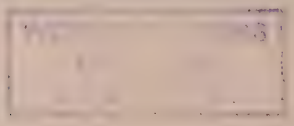
Long before the corn is ripe the " small birds " appear upon the scene, especially that little rascal the house-sparrow. He has brought up two or three families in the ivy in spite of the gardener's efforts, feeding his offspring on chicken food and what he has picked up round the house, and now off they all troop to the corn-fields long before the corn is ripe. From their lurking places in the hedges, especially hedges not well trimmed, they fly upon the corn-stalks—particularly the wheat—and either bend them down or break them so that they can feast upon the ears at their leisure. And when the corn is in stooks they have an easier job still. It is a wonder the poor farmer gets as much as he does. All he can do is to keep his hedges low, blaze away a few cartridges and hire small urchins to beat the tom-tom on old tea-trays to scare them away.

It must be owned that there are many mischief-workers amongst our feathered friends. Often the good they do counterbalances the evil and we try to make excuses for all—or almost all. But, however much one may boast of being a bird-lover, it is hard to say nice things about them when one sees a field of kale torn to ribbons by woodpigeons, or rows of peas shelled completely in a few minutes by the wary and beautiful hawfinch which was so common here in 1922, or a row of crocuses picked off by sparrows for mere amusement. The bullfinch too—delightful bird as he is—is a sad destroyer of fruit buds. And what is to be said of thrushes and blackbirds in the strawberry and the gooseberry seasons ? Or even of robin red-breast if he slips into the greenhouse when the grapes are ripe ? And what of the charming tits ? Can we blame them very much when the curved stalk of a ripening pear offers such a handy perch from which to pick such tempting food ?

They say that Saint Francis once saw countless birds in some trees (perhaps starlings !) and others close by in a field, so he stepped aside to preach to his " brothers." This is no doubt true enough, for it was just like him to do so ; but it is not so easy to believe the rest of the pretty story. It tells how the birds in the trees joined their companions on the ground and that all listened attentively till the last words of the benediction had been spoken. Then they bowed their heads and flapped their wings and showed signs of great delight, after which they flew away singing splendidly in four bands, north, south, east and west, so making a large cross in the air to indicate how the teaching of Saint Francis was to pass to all the four corners of the earth.

Oh that some new Saint Francis would call together our mischievous birds and make an equally deep impression upon them ! How much better it would be than the harsh methods of conversion to which we are reduced, which savour more of the inquisition than the gentle influence of the simple-minded saint of Assisi.

We look at birds from so many points of view : as objects of beauty, as songsters, as friends, as enemies, or as game and table birds. With what a different eye do we contemplate the pale green-grey newly hatched gosling and the fat Michaelmas goose ; with what a different ear do we listen to the nightingale's song and the harsh croak of the carrion crow ; what a different welcome do we extend to the robin and the sparrow ! Naturally our mood varies, and this month we must own to what are known as " mixed feelings."



XXXVIII

MAY 1924

BENEFICENT BIRDS

Withal there come unto our need
Woodcock and snipe when swallows go;
And now the water-hen flies low
With feet that well-nigh touch the reeds,
And plovers cry about the meads,
And the stares chatter; certes, sir,
It is a fair place all the year.

WM. MORRIS.

WHAT is a "skip jack"? "A conceited, empty-headed cox-comb," say the dictionaries, or "a child's toy made from the merry-thought of a fowl or goose," or "a family of beetles," otherwise called "click-beetles" which, by means of a strange joint between their heads and their bodies, can skip long distances even when laid on their backs. The grubs of these beetles are the wire-worms which every farmer and gardener knows only too well, nasty brown things like bits of dull copper wire with six legs in front and a foot near the tail. They live three or four years before they turn into beetles, burrowing down in the winter and coming up in the spring to attack the young corn. Then the farmer rolls his yellowing fields in the vain hope of crushing these tough creatures. That is, of course, impossible, but the rolling does good for all that, whether

by obstructing the passage of the grubs or in some other way it is difficult to say. No effective method of dealing with the wire-worms themselves has yet been discovered, so we must be thankful to the wagtails, finches and larks which follow the ploughman along the furrows, and to the starlings, rooks, thrushes, fieldfares, redwings and all the other birds that feed upon them ; above all, the peewit or lapwing—most elegant of birds—whose pretty but flavourless eggs are unluckily considered to be a delicacy. It has been truly said that as long as plovers' eggs are collected and sold in the markets as they are to-day, so long will wire-worms and other pests flourish.

Amongst those " other pests " is the equally well-known " leather-jacket," larger and tougher than the wire-worm, and legless. It is the grub of that rather ridiculous fly the " daddy-long-legs " who excites a smile by his blundering habits and the absurd way in which he hangs by one of his long legs as if he really had a too bountiful supply of them. Leather-jackets only live one season, but they do as much harm to corn as wire-worms, and they are equally hard to exterminate. Many birds are fond of them. When blackbirds and thrushes poke their bills into the lawn they are as likely to extract a leather-jacket as a succulent worm.

Centipedes and millepedes are also, though wrongly, sometimes called wire-worms. Centipedes are mostly yellow or brown, can have a hundred or more legs, and feed altogether on an animal diet. Millepedes may have many more legs. The best known is shiny black with white legs and a disagreeable smell. They are very destructive to vegetables. All of these many-legged animals are eaten by birds when they can get at them, but they prefer darkness to light and are therefore not easy to find.

Another underground pest which some birds, and fortunately moles also, are fond of is the great ugly, yellow-faced white grub of the cock-chafer. It lives for three years and does most damage in its second year when it feeds on the roots of various plants. The cock-chafer beetles, which boom about so merrily on summer evenings, eat the leaves of elms and oaks and are so destructive to forest trees in France that they set women and children to collect and destroy them methodically. In one district of the Department of Seine and Marne—well known to our soldiers during the war—an average of twenty-eight millions have been taken yearly. The night-jar or goat-sucker, the jay, the owls and probably other birds eat them freely.

These are a few examples of the underground pests. Let us now consider one or two familiar ones that work above ground. There are two kinds of cabbage butterfly —the "large white" and the "small white." The former does far the most harm. The eggs are laid in batches, mostly on the under surfaces of the leaves. Unfortunately the fleshy grey-green caterpillars are disliked by birds, though they relish the caterpillars of the "small white" which are comparatively harmless, their eggs being only deposited singly and in smaller numbers than those of the "large white."

There are other caterpillars which are repulsive to most birds. The large hairy yellow and black caterpillars of the beautiful buff-tip moth are greedily eaten by cuckoos and jays but by them only, so that where they are absent the caterpillars may become a plague, as they were in the lime trees under which I played as a boy. The same may be said of the red, blue and black lackey caterpillars which live in huge colonies and devastate the orchards. But no birds at all will eat the yellow and

black-banded caterpillar of the cinnabar moth—dark green with red spots—which is common here and sometimes strips the leaves off whole fields of ragwort. And if some inexperienced pheasant chicks are tempted by the fleshy morsel it is said that they die of their indiscretion.

These are glaring examples, and in the meantime countless little birds are daily and unobtrusively making away with an infinite number of grubs and insects, most of which are noxious. Such are the tit-mice, the warblers, the wrens, the flycatchers, the swallows and the swifts, nuthatches, tree creepers and many others; while the more powerful wood-peckers, besides searching for insect food, burrow after the great flesh-coloured caterpillars of the goat-moth, and those of the wood-leopard and others that bore into and destroy the trunks of willows and fruit and forest trees.

Clearly it needs much more space to deal with birds that are beneficial to agriculture than with those that are mischievous to it. Farmers and gardeners would be badly off without their help. It is not, perhaps, a pleasant thought that these birds, whose plumage we admire, and whose songs delight us, are busy all day or all night, as the case may be, killing and eating their fellow creatures, but by this means alone the balance is preserved which enables us to gather in the kindly fruits of the earth, and we deserve our fate if after exterminating say owls, kestrels, cuckoos and lapwings, our gardens are overrun with field-mice and lackey caterpillars and our fields are riddled with wire-worms.

We have here only spoken of our own local birds and have by no means exhausted the list even of them. Much more might be said if we were to visit in imagination the fisheries along the coast, the guano islands of Peru, the dirty towns and villages in the east, or other outlandish places.

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XXXIX

JUNE 1924

THE BEECH

Not a beech but bears some cipher
  Tender word or amorous text.
If one vale sounds Angelina
  Angelina sounds the next.
GONGORA Y ARGOTE (1561–1627).

THE beech tree has been here, on and off, much longer than man. Sometimes the temperature was too hot for it, sometimes much too cold; but when our climate became temperate the beech settled down for good, and has shown a special affection for Oxfordshire ever since. This county has always been well wooded, and still boasts more than one "forest." In old days a dense forest—the home of wolves, wild boar, deer and other beasts—covered most of the Chiltern Hills, and the large stretches of beech woods between Caversham and Chinnor, so obvious in Plott's map of 1705, as well as in modern maps, are doubtless remains of this forest which has been gradually eaten into by advancing cultivation. We do not know if it ever reached Whitchurch, but it is safe to say that one hundred and fifty years ago, and probably much longer than that, the nearest actual woods were those beyond Hart's Lock, and at the back of Hardwick and Path Hill. Here our

largest beeches are to be found, though the glory of the Hart's Lock woods has departed, except at the Goring end of the old bridle path. Farington's sketches show that the open fields which occupied the sites of Coombe Park and Bozedown were almost treeless about the year 1790, and beyond Whitchurch Gate stretched the bare heath formed by Whitchurch Common, Goring Heath and Woodcote Common. Our largest beeches in Whitchurch itself cannot therefore be more than about a hundred and twenty years old, and such trees are not more than two feet in diameter at the base. The largest trees on the bridle path have a diameter of three feet six inches or four feet. You can guess their age but would probably guess wrong. They are dwarfs beside the old veterans at Burnham Beeches or Knowle.

The word "beech," which in various forms is met with throughout Northern Europe, probably means "a tree with an edible fruit." There is also a curious connection between the words *beech* and *book*, because, it has been suggested, our earliest books were written on pieces of beechen board. Pigs and deer, squirrels and mice, woodpigeons and fowls and other intelligent animals know how good beech-mast is for food. Not so the average Englishman, though the French use beech-nut oil for cooking and think it excellent for frying fish. However, it is not a crop to be depended upon, for the beech is said to only flower every few years. This is not universally true, for beech flower is now to be seen along with the husks of last year's seeds. Occasionally, as happened last year, enormous numbers of young plants develop, forming a rich green carpet under the trees. Only a few of these seedlings survived, but at the present time scattered groups of past years' young beeches may be seen with five or six green leaves

each, prepared to continue the inevitable struggle for existence.

The French take much more care of their beech woods than we do. The woods form characteristic dark square patches in a Normandy landscape, with their tall, straight white stems, apparently all the same distance apart, like pillars round a temple. Beech timber, though the best of firewoods, is of small use for building, but is used for Windsor chairs and other cheap furniture, umbrella handles, bowls, screws and other wooden machinery, some parts of ships, and so on. In France large quantities are used for the clumsy wooden shoes or sabots in which the peasants tramp over the fields and clatter along the streets.

These general matters were not, however, what I had meant to speak about, but rather to direct attention to what may be seen on the lovely green-grey stem of a healthy beech tree. If standing alone and left to itself, the stem usually divides near the ground into its main branches and bristles with small shoots which hide it almost entirely. But in a wood it is different. It is drawn up towards the light amongst its crowding companions and perhaps may not divide till it has reached a height of forty or fifty feet. The best stems are nearly straight, but many are crooked and some show a slight spiral twist. A narrow black line (sometimes two), like the black mark on a donkey's back, meanders down one side of the stem. It is the track of the stream of rainwater and is formed by the junction of several rivulets on the branches. Looking more closely, if the bark is healthy and not coated with lichens and other growths, you will see that it is marked by delicate horizontal lines as if slightly crumpled, like a silk stocking before it is braced up. And besides these there are

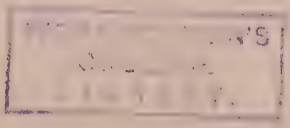
other coarser lines which strike the eye from a short distance. Some are horizontal, but most of them are V's with the point upwards, thus Λ. These marks were caused by branches which have broken off years ago. The shape of the V depends on whether the branch grew upwards or downwards and whether it slanted much or little. If it came out straight the line is horizontal. All this is easily explained by observing the lines starting from the existing branches. More or less round knobs are to be seen on many beech stems; they are mostly quite small, but sometimes as large as eggs. They are easily knocked off with a hammer. These are buds that have never formed branches. If cut across they are found to be completely surrounded by bark, so they keep on growing very slowly in their nests in the main bark of the tree. Still closer inspection shows that the colour of the bark is caused by minute vegetable growths, in examining which you may very likely see tiny white specks, the small scales or fluffiness caused by a minute insect that is playing havoc with the beech trees in this country. Trees badly affected by it often snap off ten or fifteen feet from the ground, the heart being rotten. It is almost impossible to destroy this pest even with a soapy solution of paraffin applied with a brush. One wealthy man is said to have hired a brigade of fire-engines for the purpose; but we are not told the result.

Other animals leave their marks on beech stems, notably rabbits, hares, and men. Rabbits and hares gnaw off great slabs of bark in winter, and if they go all round the stem the tree dies. If they only go partly round scarring occurs, and it is to be noticed that the rounded healing edge is always thicker above than below. If the exposed wood does not rot and the patch

is not too large it may be completely scarred over, like a healed ulcer.

Human beings love carving their names on beech stems ; the smooth bark seems to cry out for the pocket-knife, and a shocking mess they make of it with their deformed hearts and other atrocities. The most gentlemanly way of autographing a beech stem, if the temptation is irresistible, is just to scratch half through the bark. Such initials will last for years, smooth and neat, like a certain J. D. 1853 on a tree by the bridle path. Deep cuts gape in an ugly way. The worst offenders are those who surround their initials with a deep cut right through the bark. Of course the bark included in this square or circle dies and in time comes off ; unless by chance it adheres till the scar closes over it. In that case, or if the letters are cut deeply into the wood, the names (of these fond lovers perhaps) will be covered by layers of new wood and may possibly be brought to light years afterwards when the log is split for firewood. There is a specimen of this in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons in London. On a sporting estate certain round or oval marks may be seen on the bark, sometimes near the ground, sometimes fifteen or twenty feet up. They are the stretched scars produced by shot aimed at pheasants, rabbits or rats. I sent a specimen of this to Kew, but they would have none of it and insisted that the marks were caused by some special fungus, which only shows how wise men can go wrong if shut up in a laboratory.

When at last the tree is felled or branches are cut off, the sawn surfaces are soon marked by velvety black lines radiating from the centre. These are produced by a minute fungus, allied to the yeast plant, which has a special affection for beech trees.



XL

JULY 1924

LIZARDS

Better be the head of a lizard than the tail of a dragon.—PROVERB.

NO one but an Irishman would dream of suggesting that Saint Patrick (who, by the way, was an Englishman, born, it is said, near the Severn about A.D. 389) really banished all reptiles from Ireland. To be sure very few reptiles (using the word in its broad sense) *do* occur in the Emerald Isle—only the common lizard, the common frog, the natterjack and the smooth newt—and they are looked upon with horror and indignation. The smooth newt they call the " man-eater " or the " man-keeper " and say that if you go to sleep in a field with your mouth open the man-eater may crawl in and bring up a family in your inside with disastrous results.

Belgium, just across the English Channel, has twenty-two reptiles (again using the word in the broad sense) and Great Britain has twelve or thirteen to Ireland's four. The differences are supposed to be accounted for by two great depressions of the land which took place very gradually in long past times and were separated by a period of elevation. When the whole country was beneath the sea, all land animals and plants must either have been destroyed or have migrated south. When

THE GARDEN, COOMBE END FARM

From photographs by Sir Wm. T. Lister K.C.M.G.

the land rose again it rose so high that Ireland was joined to Great Britain and Great Britain to the Continent. Thereupon the animals crawled, flew or swam back; but before they had all reached Ireland the land sank again, causing Great Britain and Ireland to become separate islands; and, as the Irish Sea is deeper than the German Ocean, Ireland was cut off from Great Britain before the English Channel, which cuts off Great Britain from the Continent, was formed, and in consequence, it has not only fewer reptiles than we have but fewer mammals too—only twenty-two against our forty.

Our "Reptiles" are divided into three groups: the Lizards, the Snakes and the Amphibians (frogs, toads and newts).

I speak with great diffidence about our Whitchurch reptiles. One really needs to have spent his boyhood in a place to form a friendly acquaintance with its smaller wild animals. The mind of the inquisitive boy is less distracted than the man's and his eyes nearer to the ground and probably much sharper, so that he sees, or ought to see, a great deal more. Still it may be said with some confidence that these nine may possibly be met with—the Common Lizard, the Slow-worm, the Grass Snake, the Viper or Adder, the Frog, the Toad, the Natterjack, the Crested Newt and the Smooth Newt.

We will first consider the two lizards. Lizards are scaly animals usually, but not always, having four more or less well-developed legs and a tail. Unlike snakes, they have eyelids, generally ear openings, and their tongues are merely cleft instead of being forked like those of serpents—though the cleft is often very deep, as anyone may see who can endure half an hour in the stuffy reptile house at the "Zoo." They lay eggs,

which in some species, e.g. our common lizard, break and let free the infant lizard at the moment of being deposited.

The little common or sand lizard is our representative of the repulsive iguanas, monitors, and other large lizards; it is the nearest relation we have of the crocodiles and alligators of tropical countries and of the gigantic lizards that flourished here in earlier periods of the world's history. The common lizard is a delicate little fellow about five inches long, half its length being made up of tail. The colour is some variety of brown or grey above and orange, red or yellow underneath. Sandy heaths and old stone walls with plenty of snug crevices are its favourite haunts, which accounts for its not being a familiar object here. It comes out on baking summer days, and when alarmed shoots away with lightning rapidity. As in the case of many other lizards the bones in the last three-quarters of the tail are so constructed that the greater part of the tail can snap off with the utmost readiness. This happens when the animal is roughly handled or caught by the tail, and it is no doubt a life-saving arrangement; for whilst the foe is gobbling up the still wriggling morsel the lizard itself escapes. In time a new tail forms, or rather a stump of a tail, to save appearances, this time without any true bones, but with only a sort of gritty core.

The only other lizard you are likely to see here is the slow-worm or blind-worm. "What! the slow-worm a lizard?" cries the murderous schoolboy with stick uplifted to kill what he takes for a venomous serpent and probably calls a "deaf adder." Yes; it is a lizard, though it looks like a snake, as it is limbless and has no ear openings. It differs from a snake in having movable eyelids, a cleft but not forked tongue, a small mouth

that will not stretch, and, under its skin, rudiments of shoulder and hip bones, which seem to show that its ancestors once had limbs but found they could do as well or better without them. It must be added that a few snakes, the huge boa-constrictor and python, for example, have tiny thigh bones and a pair of minute claws, which represent their hind feet. The slow-worm takes three or four years to reach maturity, its full length being twelve or at most eighteen inches. In colour it is grey or fawn-colour with a silvery or steely sheen and it is bluish black beneath. There is a dark line along the middle of the back. It is covered with minute closely fitting scales and feels strangely smooth and slippery when taken into the hand.

Slow-worms are often to be seen basking in the grass on sunny days, but being neither slow nor blind they quickly escape into holes or amongst the herbage if they are disturbed. They are perfectly harmless and most useful in the garden, for their favourite food is the destructive small grey slug; they also eat spiders, insects and small earthworms. On no account therefore should they be destroyed. Their chief enemies, besides man, are hedgehogs and vipers. Like snakes, they shed their skins from time to time, or rather the outer part of their skins, then called "sloughs." It is said that the frequency of this occurrence depends upon whether it is a good or bad grey slug season. I should not like to vouch for the truth of this statement. They also resemble snakes in retiring for the winter to some convenient hollow where they lie coiled up with some of their fellows in a state of torpor waiting for the coming of spring.

In the reptile house at the Zoological Gardens there is a case containing a good many of the "skink" family

of lizards: to which family the slow-worm belongs. Some have four good legs and dart about like ordinary lizards and burrow frantically in the sand which they take for the sand of the desert. Others have only hind limbs or only fore limbs and very shabby and useless ones they are. Others have practically no limbs at all. After seeing them there is no difficulty in believing that the slow-worm is really a lizard and not a snake. It is a good illustration of the way in which unused or imperfectly used organs or faculties dwindle and disappear, as is the case with the wisdom teeth of some civilized races, including our own, and the memories and powers of observation of those who do not make a point of keeping these faculties well trained and exercised.

XLI

AUGUST 1924

SNAKES, FROGS AND TOADS

When you see a snake, never mind where he comes from. —PROVERB.

The frog that has not seen the sea thinks the well a fine stretch of water.—JAPANESE PROVERB.

> Sweet are the uses of adversity ;
> Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous
> Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.
>
> SHAKESPEARE.

LAST month some of the differences between snakes and lizards were pointed out, but nothing was said about the extraordinary looseness with which the bones of the skull and the two halves of the lower jaw of snakes are bound together and the very free movement between the lower jaw and the skull. As a result of this looseness, not only have they an enormous gape, but the large animals they seize can pass down their throats into their bodies, which are also easily distended owing to the mobility of their ribs. An adder can comfortably swallow a large frog. Some years ago a snake at the Zoo, from carelessness or affection, swallowed his wife, and we all went to see the result of this horrid domestic tragedy. By flattening and tilting up of the palate snakes can direct their upper

fangs forwards, thus converting them into effective weapons when striking their prey. The poison is made in small glands near the eyes and runs down grooves at the back of these poison fangs.

Two snakes occur in this neighbourhood, the Common or Grass Snake, and the Viper or Adder. It is not a perfectly simple thing when you are hesitating as to the fate of the rapidly gliding reptile, to decide, on the spur of the moment, which of the two it is, and yet the distinction is important, for the grass snake is harmless and useful while the adder is poisonous. The grass snake is the larger of the two, a full-grown female may be four feet long and a male three feet. An adder is seldom two feet long and has a blunter tail. But the length of the creature does not help much, as we have no means of judging its age. The grass snake is of a greyish or olive colour with two lines of black spots and a row of black bars along each side. The adder is browner, but the colour varies, and it is black underneath. A zigzag black line along the back is very distinctive, but in dark specimens this is hardly visible. The grass snake has a striking yellow or white patch on its neck like a shirt collar, and a black patch behind this, and is yellow underneath. The head of the adder is the flatter of the two. The grass snake is fond of moist places, takes readily to the water, and feeds on frogs, toads, newts, tadpoles and worms. The adder is found in dry places and prefers mice, voles and other small mammals, but will also eat birds, lizards, slow-worms, frogs, newts and large slugs. The grass snake lays a large batch of eggs in a warm place such as a dunghill ; the eggs of the adder hatch as they are being laid and the little reptiles start an active existence on their own account immediately. There is a widespread

belief that if danger approaches they take refuge by jumping into their mother's mouth. Scientific men are sceptical about this, seeing that reptiles, as a rule, care little about their offspring when once they are hatched, but most of us are only too ready to believe whatever we are told.

Such are the chief differences between these two snakes; but so great is the ancient enmity between man and the serpent that few can resist the temptation to kill them at sight. That is, however, no excuse for taking that harmless and useful lizard, the slow-worm, for one of the fraternity.

Snakes wriggle along with sideways movement, not up and down like the serpents shown in coats of arms. They cannot, as is commonly supposed, leave the ground and spring at you like a dog. Adders do not attack men unless they are irritated. A likely way to be bitten is to throw yourself down in the grass for a well-earned rest and fling out your arms. If bitten the best thing to do is to bind something very tightly round the finger (or whatever limb is bitten) and suck the wound both before and after incising it. I have seen one or two adder bites. They caused great swelling and a good deal of temporary illness; but, as usually happens in such cases, the patients recovered. It is foolish to grasp a poisonous snake by the middle. If you must handle it, take it by the neck or the tip of the tail.

There is a third English snake—the "Smooth Snake," but, though it has been found in Berkshire, it is not likely to be met with here.

Frogs and Toads are too familiar friends to need much description, but a few of their characteristics may be mentioned. They differ from other "reptiles," as do the newts, by passing through a tadpole stage, during

which they live altogether in the water, breathing by means of gills like fishes and being limbless and supplied with tails. The gills at first form little fringes at the sides of the head, but afterwards are enclosed in "gill-cases." In early spring frogs and toads crowd into the ponds and streams with clamorous croaking, and deposit their eggs, frog-spawn being in the well-known globular masses, and toad-spawn in delicate chains festooning from reed to reed or twig to twig. In the late summer or autumn, when the tadpoles have lost their gills and their tails and grown their legs, they leave the water as tiny frogs and toads, but they take some years to reach maturity as is shown by the presence of small frogs on land at the same time as the ponds are full of tadpoles.

There is only one British frog, but there are two toads—the Common Toad and the Natterjack. I have only seen the latter at the Zoo; it occurs in Ireland and is said to be pretty common; I have no evidence that it has been met with here. It is smaller than the common toad and has a pale yellowish stripe down the middle of its back. It has shorter legs with which it shambles along, but never attempts even the clumsy jumps that make ordinary toads look so ridiculous. Frogs and toads are smooth-skinned, and toads especially shed their skins more or less as snakes do. The skin of toads secretes an offensive fluid which is not poisonous, though often supposed to be. It is no doubt a protection against possible toad-eaters. Toads vary in colour with the localities they haunt. Frogs quickly change colour in accordance with the amount of light and the colour of their surroundings, being sometimes almost black, sometimes a bright yellow. Under the microscope we see innumerable, very minute, star-shaped cells in their skins containing a black pigment that spreads out

to the furthest limit of the cells when the creature is dark but collects into black spots in the centres of the cells when it turns light. Thus the toad secures protection by making itself offensive, and the more gentlemanly frog by making itself invisible. The former is the better protection. Frogs are eaten by many larger animals including fishes, birds, snakes, weasels and even foxes and Frenchmen. The toad, on the other hand, lives in comparative safety and is not a delicacy of the table.

Millions of tadpoles are devoured by ducks and other birds and many water animals. If it were not for this we should experience something like the second plague of Egypt. And let us be thankful that they are so small. Fancy a tadpole about a foot long with a body as big as a turkey's egg, such as is known to occur. The tadpole of the North American bull-frog measures six inches, and that of one European species seven inches, with a body the size of a hen's egg.

In Shakespeare's day everyone believed in the existence of a charm-working jewel inside the head of the toad—the so-called " toad-stone." There is no truth in this ancient fable. In museums you may see " toad-stones " mounted in old rings. According to Sir Ray Lankester these are either chalcedony or the palates of a fossil fish. There is an old woodcut of a man cutting a " toadstone " out of the head of a monstrous toad.

[illegible]

XLII

SEPTEMBER 1924

NEWTS

Newts, and blindworms, do no wrong;
Come not near our fairy queen.
SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN we tie our apron strings—as I have done many hundred times—few of us know that an apron is really " a napron " : napery or naipry meaning linen cloth. If you hire a house in Scotland for a holiday they will probably tell you to bring napery, i.e. sheets, towels, etc. In England we have the word nap, corresponding to the French *nappe*; and also the familiar napkin.

In the same way we speak of " an adder," whereas it should be " a nadder " (from the old English *naedre*, a serpent); and " an aitch-bone " whereas it should be " a naitch-bone " (*nache* coming from *natica* the vulgar form of the latin word *natis*, meaning buttock); and " an umpire " which in old days was " a numpire " or " noumper " (*non par*, not equal, i.e. odd man). In all these the indefinite article *a* has, so to say, robbed the word of its first letter *n*.

Curiously enough, amongst the beasts we are now discussing there is an example of a different sort of robbery. " A newt " should be " an ewt " (or " an

eft "). Here the article *an* has been robbed of its *n*. So with some surnames : Nash means " atten ash," and Nokes " atten okes " indicating that Mr. Nash lived by an ash tree and Mr. Nokes near a clump of oaks. This particular form of borrowing may arise from our fondness for putting an *N* before christian names beginning with a vowel, e.g. Ned for Edward, Nan for Anne, Nell for Ellen, and Noll for Oliver.

But we must leave these interesting word-studies and return to the remaining Whitchurch " reptiles," which were crowded out last month, i.e. the Newts.

Three newts are met with in this country, two of which are common in or near ponds and streams and such tanks as are placed on the ground level near greenhouses. Though they are chiefly land animals and common enough, they are not nearly such intimate friends as the tail-less amphibia, frogs and toads, to which they are near relations, and, to distinguish them from which, they are called " tailed amphibia." Like them they pass through a tadpole stage, breathing by means of gills which are afterwards absorbed when their lungs develop ; but they differ from frogs and toads in having permanent tails. They do not lay their eggs in huge masses like frog-spawn, or in chains like toad-spawn, but either singly in the folded leaf of a water plant, or in very small masses. They have soft, moist skins, like frogs and toads, through which they do a good deal of breathing to help out the imperfect breathing which takes place in their lungs ; for, as they have no proper ribs, they cannot draw in a deep breath as we do, but have to swallow the air into their lungs. It is easy to feel that frogs and toads have no ribs by lifting them between the finger and thumb ; it is like lifting an empty paper bag. Newts slip off their skins, as serpents

do, in one piece. They are perfectly harmless, but there are so many superstitions about their venomous nature that they are sadly persecuted. Shakespeare classes the "gilded newt" with "the black toad, the adder blue and the eyeless venom'd worm." Newts come to the water every spring after they have reached maturity, that is probably at the end of their third year. Except at the breeding season they prefer dry or rather moist land, and in the winter they collect in masses in moist clay, under stones or bricks, or in other protected places. If the tadpole stage is not completed as it usually is by the autumn, the tadpoles spend the winter—without growing—in the ponds and streams.

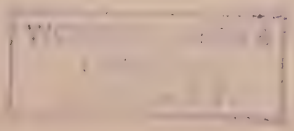
Speaking generally, newts live upon small water and land animals such as insects and worms; the larger newt is said also to devour the tadpoles of frogs and toads as well as those of the smaller newts.

Not having a suitable pond for observation here, I asked a young nephew to supply me with notes of what takes place in a certain tank with perpendicular sides close to a long row of greenhouses and seldom more than half full of water. The tank is open; the level of the water is generally some feet below the ground level, and one seldom fails to see newts swimming about in it or trying to get out. As might be expected, he reports that only the crested and the smooth newts are found, and adds: "The young crested newts can't get out of the tanks at all; we see them nearly half way up the side but it gets too dry and they can't get a grip, so they fall back. I expect that is the reason they are in the tanks. I don't know how many go away in the autumn, but any number of them go to sleep for the winter in the walls of the greenhouses and under big stones. We find some newts which are in the tank all winter frozen

in the ice, but they do not seem to suffer any inconvenience from being frozen. . . . The gardeners often find newts in the cabbages in the autumn and the belief is that this kind stings!" All these are useful observations including the—of course unfounded—superstition of the gardeners. No doubt the newts take refuge in the cabbages simply because they are planted near the tank.

Of our two ordinary newts the Common, or Smooth Newt is commoner than the Crested, Warty or Great Newt. It is also smaller, four inches as compared with six, and much less distinguished in appearance. The crested newt is a handsome fellow with his spotted black brown and warty skin, yellow under-surface and magnificent crest along the back, which is only acquired in the breeding season, and then only by the males. The common newt is of much less striking appearance. Its colour is mottled brown, and it is orange underneath. The males develop a very moderate crest in the spring. Newts thus follow the habits of the wild duck and some other birds and not that of the plainly dressed human bridegroom. The splendid drake moults its gay feathers in May and wears its "eclipse plumage" till September, during which time it may easily be mistaken for its modestly attired spouse and brood of ducklings. This is supposed to be for protective purposes during this anxious period of their family life.

The third English newt is called the Palmate, because the toes of its hind feet are webbed. It is so much like the common newt that it is usually mistaken for it, and I am unable to say whether it is found here or not. It may be recognized by its smaller size—the length of a full-grown specimen being only three inches—by its flesh-coloured throat and by its curious tail which ends in a thread-like tip.



XLIII

OCTOBER 1924

WASPS' NESTS

And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling-place for dragons, an astonishment, and a hissing, without an inhabitant.—JEREMIAH li. 37.

BY the time this number appears, or soon after, there will be no wasps left in England except the queens, and they will be huddled up, fast asleep, in dark sheltered places with their legs drawn to their sides, and firmly holding on to something with their clenched jaws. All the rest, consisting of many males and the vast hordes of workers (imperfect females) will have fallen victims to inclement weather, murder and cannibalism, the attacks of insects, parasites and other diseases. Queens, which are larger than the workers, are only produced at the end of the season, so that the number of queens starting from each nest depends upon whether it is in full activity at this time. There may be some hundreds, but there may be few or none : a feeble nest which I examined on September 8th was already passing into decay, it contained only a few grubs and there were no queen-cells. Thus an inclement summer should be followed by a shortage of queens. On the other hand a mild winter may lead to the same result, for a sunny day may tempt the sleepy queens

from their hiding places, only to die of cold and starvation.

We have in England three common wasps that make their nests underground, and one that hangs its nest from a twig in a tree or bush. They are so much alike that they can hardly be distinguished one from another without a magnifying glass. There are not many here this year, but all that I have examined have been of the kind known as the Common Wasp. Let us shortly consider its life-history.

In early spring, when the queens leave their retreats and the "queen-collector" and the fruit-grower are after them in full cry, they may often be seen gnawing the surface of oak gates and fences, or busy amongst the grey lichen on hawthorn hedges, or settling on the muddy banks of ponds apparently to drink, or feeding on anything suitable they can find.

Already each queen has discovered a convenient hole for her nest—a mouse-hole in a field or hedge perhaps, or in a heap of turf set aside by the gardeners for mould. For some weeks she constantly passes in and out bringing in the chewed and moistened wood or lichen, or perhaps even paper, with which to build her nest, and later, food for her earliest offspring. Then farewell to the world. The rest of her life is devoted to laying eggs—some say twenty or thirty thousand, some fifty or sixty thousand—in pitch darkness underground. And her reward is to perish ignominiously in the autumn with all her progeny except a few favoured daughters. Truly the history of a wasp community is a strange one: they work for good and for evil for a few months with feverish activity and then are wiped bodily from the face of the earth.

The smallest wasps' nest, such as we find sometimes in our turf heap, is about the size and shape of a golf-ball.

It is suspended by a short stout paper stalk from a root, and consists of three or four envelopes of grey wasp-paper laid down in curious scale-like flakes. There is a hole at the bottom which is the front-door. On opening the nest there is seen, at the upper part, a round, flat paper disc or plate hung from the roof by a stalk like that which suspends the nest from the root. On the under surface of the plate are twenty or thirty paper cells like the wax cells of a honeycomb, only smaller and placed vertically instead of horizontally. Some are empty, others contain wasp-grubs hanging head downwards for convenience in feeding, others have *pupæ* (chrysalides) shut in by a white, silky covering; one or two contain fully formed wasps, and a few more show, at the upper part, only a little of the black excrement of a wasp that has been hatched, and are ready for the next tenant. An egg may be seen at the upper and inner part of some otherwise empty cells. Each cell will be used two or three times.

All the first brood are small imperfect females (workers). They are brought up by the queen, who feeds them with carefully chewed "green fly" and other food; but as soon as there are a dozen or twenty lively workers she hands this part of the business over to them and for the rest of her days simply feeds and lays eggs. This she does to such good purpose that in favourable seasons—that is favourable as regards food and temperature—wasps are produced in appalling numbers.

To dig out a "strong" nest in the late summer in a field needs some care and much patience. Then we find a very different state of things. The nest may be as much as eight inches across, nearly filling the hole hollowed out by the indefatigable workers. They have removed the sand or mould and allowed the larger stones to fall to the bottom—where they lie in an accumulation

of refuse. This is probably already the home of the grubs of beetles which will ultimately eat up the remains of the wasp community. The old envelope has been done away with, but a similar though much larger paper covering surrounds the nest. Inside it are seven to thirteen of the flat round plates mentioned before. Each is joined to the one above it by a number of paper columns just long enough to allow room for the workers to crawl about upon its upper surface and feed the grubs; while upon its under surface the next tier of cells has been built. The middle plates are larger than those above and below so that the whole nest is a flattened globe. Grubs of all ages occupy the cells. Towards the end of the autumn larger cells are made for the larger workers which appear at that time, and for the queens. The number of the queens can apparently be regulated merely by the quantity—not the quality—of the food supplied to them. The males or drones are hatched in ordinary cells. These unfortunates have "a short life but a gay one." They soon perish in the general destruction that takes place at the approach of winter. Then desolation like that of Babylon or Nineveh reigns where all was busy life; and if you dig out an old wasps' nest or one that has been "taken" some weeks before, you will probably find a merry company of beetles eating up the refuse and the corpses. It is stated that old nests are never occupied again.

The rather shiny Wood-wasp which generally builds in trees or shrubs, but sometimes in pots or in holes near the surface of the ground, is said to be common, but we certainly do not very often find its nests here. They are elegant structures made just on the same plan as those of its underground relations, but are pear-shaped rather than round.

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XLIV

NOVEMBER 1924

MORE ABOUT WASPS

> The evil that men do lives after them,
> The good is oft interred with their bones.
>
> SHAKESPEARE.

WE said that the wasp's brief day was, like that of most of us, busily occupied with a mixture of good and evil. In the home of my boyhood summer-flies abounded indoors, and fallen plums, mulberries and other fruit littered the garden. We used to feel a sort of guilty pleasure in watching a wasp seize upon a fly, nip off its wings, kill it with jaws or sting and bear it off home. There was also a dare-devil but anxious pride in scaring half a dozen wasps from a partly eaten apricot or pear and munching what was left. These are two examples of the good and the evil done by wasps, for they are both useful scavengers and troublesome thieves. The larvæ are mostly fed on animal food such as aphides, flies, caterpillars and grubs, and, as they are numerous and hungry, the gardener and the house-holder no doubt reap some benefit in consequence. But adult wasps are omnivorous. Nothing comes amiss to them. They love sweet things of all kinds and have a taste for carrion and butcher's meat. They can suck the honey out of certain flowers, for instance those of

the carrot tribe, and may often be seen (especially the wood-wasp) on the dark purple blossoms of the figwort. In later autumn, when the fruit is picked and the garden almost empty, the ivy puts forth its yellow blossoms, which open and disclose a round, honey-covered surface attractive to flies of all sorts—big and little. Amongst them come the remaining wasps to sip their last meal, and buzz their final anthem for the year. From all these flowers they obtain honey in the orthodox way and so help in fertilizing them; but they have not such good tongues for the purpose as bees, and, if the flowers are too deep for them, they are obliged, as the saying is, to " get over the garden wall " : they cut their way into the base of fuchsia or snapdragon flowers, or use the holes made by bumble-bees for the purpose and rob its nectar without helping the process of fertilization. One of their evil habits is to set upon a weak stock of bees, kill them and empty their combs. They even make raids upon hives when the bees are strong and active.

On the whole it is difficult to estimate the good done by wasps and impossible to overlook the mischief; and so, no doubt, we all think—but perhaps quite wrongly—that we should do better without them.

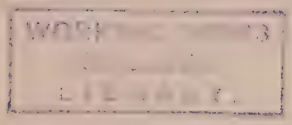
Obviously wasp traps do not materially diminish their numbers. They may entice them away from the fruit, but, if very fragrant, may attract some to the garden from afar who would otherwise have kept away; for wasps are supposed to have great powers of smell as well as of vision and the marvellous " homing " instinct of their tribe. We can only keep them under by killing queen wasps in the spring, and destroying the nests with tar or cyanide of potassium in the summer; but it is a difficult job to find nests if the garden is surrounded by fields and woods. Even after a season like the present,

in which they have been few and feeble, enough queens will probably be produced to start a formidable number of colonies the following year.

Wasps have four wings, whereas flies have only two. The front and hind wings cannot, however, move independently, as they are fastened together by a row of minute hooks just visible with a good pocket lens, and forming a beautiful object with a low power of the microscope. A sharp pair of human eyes will easily make out the two large black eyes of a wasp and also the three smaller ones on the top of its head. In thus examining a wasp one cannot fail to be struck with the beauty of its yellow and black coat and the delicate network on the wings. These markings are used by scientific men to distinguish our "social" wasps one from the other. It must be remembered that we are only speaking of "social" wasps, i.e. those which live in communities, and not of the numerous "solitary" wasps. The gaudy colouring is supposed to warn off enemies who recognize wasps as things to be left alone. Some other insects imitate their yellow and black stripes in a wonderful way. There is a clear-winged moth, and a large sword-fly, both stingless, that may easily be mistaken for hornets. And some flies look uncommonly like wasps. In spite of their "protective colouring" some birds will eat wasps, and we have seen tomtits picking off bees from the front of a skep; it is unlikely that they chose the stingless drones. Only the female wasps—queens and workers—have stings; it is the same with bees, and is curiously unlike what happens in the case of some other animals. Social wasps seldom attack you if you move slowly, however near you approach them. But serious consequences may follow when a horse treads on a wasps' nest in ploughing, or when a

hornets' nest is disturbed. For all that, the badger unearths wasps' nests and devours the grubs, although he does not find there the store of tasty honey which attracts him to the nests of certain bumble-bees.

The season of mists has set in. The ivy blossom is over and only a few late autumn flowers remain to attract the insects, but we may still see a stray wasp—probably a worker—amongst the swarms of flies and the butterflies, red admiral, tortoiseshell, and peacock, which decorate the clumps of Michaelmas daisies by opening and shutting their glowing wings.



XLV

DECEMBER 1924

BEEK TITHES

> Good morrow, brother Bedford . . .
> There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
> Would men observingly distil it out.
>
> SHAKESPEARE.

HALF-WAY along the Hardwick road a footpath leading to David's Lane crosses the lower part of Bozedown Field. Near the end of it you see curious zigzag hedges marking out some very irregularly shaped fields on both sides of the Hardwick to Path Hill road. The long narrow field beyond the road stretches almost up to Path Hill. Those on the Whitchurch side of the road occupy the hill side and are prolonged down to the river and then extend along the bank by a narrow strip almost as far as Hardwick House. These fields, which include a considerable part of the " common mead " (see No. VI) are marked upon a map of about the year 1810—made when the last open fields and Whitchurch common were enclosed—as Beek (or Beck) Tithes. This quaint name carries us a long way back in the history of our parish.

When William the First conquered England in 1066 he brought with him a number of Norman barons, amongst whom was a certain Milo (or Miles) Crispin, son of

Gilbert Crispin, Baron of Bec, in Normandy. Before the conquest the "honour" (lordship over several scattered manors) of Wallingford belonged to a noble Saxon named Wygod. His only daughter was married to Robert D'Oyly, William the Conqueror's constable, and their daughter—half Norman half Saxon—became the bride of Milo Crispin. Milo, already an extensive landowner, thus became the lord of the "honour" of Wallingford, which included the manors of Whitchurch, half Mapledurham, Gatehampton and many others. It may have gratified his Norman friends and he probably thought it a pious act, but it must have been very disgusting to his Oxfordshire vassals, when he gave the tithes of the honour of Wallingford as well as the Manor of Swyncombe to the Abbey of Bec—his Normandy home—in the year 1087. That is why these Bozedown fields were called Beek or Beck tithes, and some in Mapledurham acquired such strange names as Back, Black, Beckerlewens, Beckharbers or even Beckharvest, the explanation of which will appear later.

The little hamlet of Swyncombe and its tiny Norman church may be known to some of my readers. It lies in a secluded valley of the Chilterns about six miles from Wallingford and barely ten from Whitchurch. Here the priors of Okeburn (now Ogbourn) near Marlborough, who were the English procurators (agents) of the Abbey of Bec, established a monastery of Norman Benedictine monks which lasted a long time, in fact till 1414, when all alien priories were dissolved by Henry V. They had a three days' fair of their own on the feast of St. Botolph, which was changed to the feast of St. Martin because it clashed with Wallingford fair ; and no doubt they had a good time and lived a more or less happy and idle life.

There is a record of the yearly payments from this district which is interesting and amusing. "Also a tithe at Wytchirch of the yearly value of thirteen shillings and four pence. Also a tithe at Gethampton of the yearly value of six shillings and eight pence. Also, in two water-mills at Garinges [Goring] twenty-one shillings and eight pence." This sounds a trivial affair, but we must remember that money went a long way in those days, that is, it was worth a great deal more. For example, we find in the inventory of the priory that a cart horse cost only four shillings and a bull the same, whilst one hundred and ten feeble ewes were worth sixpence each, and a hundred male and female hogasters (yearling sheep ?) not more than fourpence each. Fourpence was the rent per acre of some arable land, but, strange to say, two brass pots are valued at four shillings, little less than the value of "one cart bound with iron."

After the alien priories were dissolved, whatever belonged to the priors of Okeburn passed to the Crown and then to John, Duke of Bedford, son of Henry IV. But his conscience was uneasy at owning what was once Church property, so he handed it over to the Warden and Canons of Windsor, who received these tithes till recent times. John of Bedford had no right to do this, but his brother, Henry V, forgave him.

Interesting glimpses of nine hundred years ago gather round the Benedictine Abbey of St. Mary at Bec, otherwise called Lebec, or Lebec-Hellouin. It was founded by the "venerable," or "blessed," Helluinus, or, to give him his real name, Herlwin, in 1034 or 1035. His father Ausgood was of Danish descent, but his mother, Helouise, was a Frenchwoman. His youth was spent in knightly pursuits; but at the age of forty he bade adieu to deeds of arms and became a monk in the small

WHITCHURCH, SHOWING THE OLD WOODEN BRIDGE

From aquatint after J. Farington, 1793.

monastery of Bourneville. His piety was extreme and he soon began to build a much larger monastery at Bec, and there he lived as Abbot for the remaining forty-four years of his life.

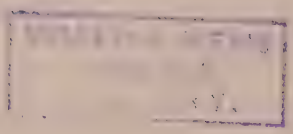
Lebec is between Honfluer and Evreux in the steep valley of Bec, bounded by " mountains," so-called, two hundred feet high ! and named after the rapid stream that flows through it to join the river Risle or Rille near the place where the abbey stood. Some people suggest that the word " bec " is the same as our north-country word " beck," a stream. But this seems hardly likely unless the name was introduced by the Norsemen who invaded Normandy. For " beck " is a Scandinavian word, while the French word " bec " means the beak of a bird, and is also applied to a point of land where two streams meet. Unfortunately the abbey was not exactly where the streams meet, and moreover the valley itself is called Bec, so we must search for another meaning, bearing in mind that not far off is the town of Caudebec and that Quebec is a city in French Canada.

To this Norman abbey came Lanfranc, afterwards the mighty Archbishop of Canterbury, in a very low state of mind. He had been a famous teacher, but religion gained power over him and he decided to become a monk in the poorest and most despised monastery he could find. As he journeyed through the forest of Ouche he was set upon by robbers, who stripped him and bound him to a tree with his hat tilted over his eyes. In the night he tried to say the " appointed Office " (prayer) but could not remember the words. Shocked at the contrast between his great learning and his ignorance of religious matters he thereupon renewed his vows, and when some passers-by untied him next morning he asked to be directed to the poorest monastery

in the neighbourhood. They sent him to Bec, which Herlwin was in the act of building. He was warmly welcomed, but he had many heart-burnings before he settled down and became Prior. He was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1070, and the rest of his great career is a matter of English history. Anselm, his successor, as well as Theobald, another Archbishop of Canterbury, were also inmates of Bec, which came to be one of the most important monasteries in France.

Little now remains of the Norman Abbey—nothing older than the fifteenth century. Comparatively modern buildings occupy much of the site, but the tomb of the blessed Herlwin may still be seen in the parish church nearby.

As far as I can discover, no one here has ever heard of the Beck tithes except the Rector, Dr. Cooke and myself, and before long our connection with those old monks may be quite forgotten in Whitchurch.



WHITCHURCH BRIDGE

Lands intersected by a narrow frith
Abhor each other. Mountains interposed
Make enemies of nations, who had else
Like kindred drops been mingled into one.
COWPER.

BEFORE the year 1793 if the amorous Mr. Pocock of Whitchurch courted the lovely Miss Sparrowhawk of Pangbourne, or *vice versa*, he had to woo her from the river bank or risk the perils of the ferry. A study of the parish registers—those dusty and rather melancholy records of old days of excitement and delight—shows how very few Pangbourne bridegrooms crossed the river. Here and there one is recorded, but most outsiders came from Reading, Goring, Southstoke and more distant parts. The entries in the Pangbourne register are even more striking than ours. Strange to say, and contrary to my expectation, the building of the bridge made no difference. The first to cross it, on matrimony intent, was in 1796, and then it was the bride, not the bridegroom; and the second entry was in 1799—three years after! It is still more strange that there has been no drawing together, from the matrimonial point of view, as far as the parish registers show, up

to the present time. In these days of higher education, newspapers, lectures, whist-drives and concerts, there are even fewer Whitchurch-Pangbourne marriages than there were at the beginning of the last century, when only a small proportion of the happy couples were able to sign their names. I record the facts without explaining them. One can understand the apparent coolness when there was lack of opportunity, when shopping and other amusements must have been purely local, and afternoon calls out of the question. But under modern conditions one would have thought that the two villages would have " like kindred drops been mingled into one."

At the time of which we are speaking (1793) the only bridges across the Thames between Caversham and Oxford were those at Wallingford, Shillingford and Abingdon. The Act of Parliament authorizing the construction of Goring bridge is dated as late as May 5, 1837, so walks and drives were mostly limited to one side of the river for dwellers by the Thames, and there must have been a great call on official and unofficial ferries.

The Whitchurch Bridge Act, dated 1792—being the thirty-second year of King George the Third—has the following words in the preamble: " Whereas the building of a Bridge, at or near the Ferry over the River Thames, from Whitchurch in the County of Oxford to the opposite Shore, in the Parish of Pangbourn in the County of Berks will be of great Utility and Advantage to the Publick: And whereas the Reverend John Lichfield, of the Parish of Goring in the said County of Oxford, and Hannah his wife, are seised of the said Ferry, in trust for Hannah Dunce [and others]: . . . And whereas the several persons herein-after named are willing and desirous, at their own Costs, to build a Bridge over the said River, at or near the said Ferry,

and to keep the same in repair, &c. &c." So leave was given to build the bridge. The first " Company of Proprietors " consisted of James Peter Auriol, Revd. John Symonds Breedon (Rector of Pangbourne), Samuel Gardiner (of Coombe), Revd. Coventry Lichfield, Revd. John Lichfield (Curate of Whitchurch), Robert Micklem, Richard Southby, Jonathan Tanner, William Vanderstegen and William Vanderstegen junior (of Cane End).

It was to be a good and substantial bridge with abutments made of stone, brick or other material. Roads and avenues not exceeding five hundred yards long were to be made on each side for the passage of travellers, cattle and carriages, and these were to be considered " to all intents and purposes as part and parcel of the said bridge." There were to be not more than twenty-four arches, one of which was to be twenty-four feet wide. The distance between the " balustrades " on each side was to be twelve feet at least, and a toll house or toll houses were to be constructed on or near the said bridge. It was further enacted that the bridge with its avenues of approach should not be a county bridge and that it should be " to all intents and purposes " extraparochial, so that it could not be " rated or assessed for or towards any public or parish rate, tax or duty whatsoever." When completed £350 was to be paid as compensation to the owners of the ferry and no one was to be allowed, under penalty of a fine, to ferry passengers across for hire or to cross the river by the weir. The profits were from the tolls, which were on the whole higher than the present ones :

For every person on foot, ½d. :
For every horse, mare, gelding, or mule, laden or unladen, and not drawing, 2d. :
For every ass, laden or unladen, drawing or not drawing, 1½d. :

For every bull, ox, cow, steer, heifer, or calf, 2d. :
For every sheep or lamb, ½d. :
For every boar, sow, or pig, ½d. :
For every horse, mare, gelding, mule or other beast, except asses, drawing any carriage, 2d. :
For every carriage with two or more wheels, 2d. for each and every wheel.

A maximum price for each was thus fixed by law, but naturally not a minimum.

No toll was to be demanded for men or horses drawing vessels to Whitchurch lock or returning from drawing.

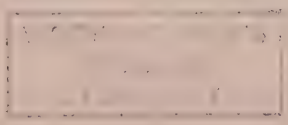
In the Act the authorized capital was £6,400, but that does not imply that this amount was actually raised. In spite of the fall in value of money, the necessity of twice rebuilding the bridge and the lowering of the tolls, the traffic has increased so enormously in the last hundred and thirty years that the enterprise, if report is to be trusted, has, at all events, not proved a failure.

The first bridge was built by "Mr. Treacher, a gentleman well known for the numerous works erected by him on the river Thames, as surveyor to the Commissioners." In a sketch made by J. Farington in 1792 it is shown as a mere line across the river, no doubt because the bridge was then unfinished. A pretty engraving of it printed in 1805 shows that it was rather steep, supported on twenty or more wooden piers. The balustrade was a sort of two-railed fence, the posts of which bulged out below, probably for elegance or strength, and were fixed to the ends of the transverse beams which supported the roadway. There was an upright ornament on each side near the middle. The toll house, Thames Bank and the Bridge House are shown in the picture as at present, the village itself is hidden by trees, but the rest of the landscape is almost treeless.

Wooden river-bridges do not last long and this was no exception to the rule. The second bridge, which most of us remember, was built about 1840. It was constructed on the same principle as the first, but was less steep and had only about half the number of piers. The balustrade was perpendicular with a criss-cross fence somewhat like the present one but simpler, and with no central ornaments.

It was much less easy to negotiate in flood time than the present iron bridge, which was built in 1901, when the second bridge showed signs of decay. One would think the term of life of an iron bridge is likely to be longer than the anticipated sixty years, but no one can guess what sort of traffic it may have to support by 1961.

Discretion as well as lack of space forbid discussion of the burning or simmering question of the abolition of tolls. The arguments for and against in this particular case are well known. Tolls are still collected at Clifton Hampden and Culham, but the modern tendency is to hand over the maintenance and repair of all bridges to the County Authorities. In my young days turnpikes were common objects of the countryside. They were like locks on the rivers—" those moving roads "—and on canals. Pound locks it may be remembered were called turnpikes. Some outrageous tolls still exasperate the traveller both in the north and in the south of England, but for the most part they have disappeared like the windmills, and are indicated only by queer squat houses dotted along the old " turnpike roads." Many a time in years gone by have I paid a toll for crossing Waterloo Bridge and often seen my grandfather's carriage stopped at the turnpike in the main road at Mile End, on its way into London.



XLVII

FEBRUARY 1925

FLOODS

> Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances;
> Of moving accidents by flood and field.
>
> SHAKESPEARE.

MOST years there are Thames floods; and they will continue, under present climatic conditions, until the problem of providing room for the flood-water to escape is solved—a much more difficult problem than some people seem to think it is.

Floods are caused in many different ways. In London an easterly gale may drive up and then hold up a spring-tide, till Wapping and the low-lying parts below London Bridge are deluged and the water reaches the level of the embankment. The rich floods which fertilize Egypt, and will some day raise cotton crops in the Soudan, depend upon torrential rains in Abyssinia swelling the Blue Nile. Melting snows in Swiss mountains make the Rhone overflow and endanger many a sturdy bridge; and there are other causes such as bursting dams, earthquakes and tidal waves, too numerous to mention. But here the matter is more simple. Our floods are the result of exceptionally heavy and continuous rains or of rapidly melting snows in Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, that is,

THAMES IN FLOOD

From a sketch by R. J. Godlee

in the Upper Thames Basin. All the tributaries then have more water in them than their narrow beds can accommodate, so they overflow the " catchment area " and quickly raise the level of the water in the main stream. This soon proves unequal to its task ; and there seems no way of preventing it from overflowing, if the weirs are already wide enough and kept free from obstruction, except by raising the banks or vastly deepening its bed. Lord Desborough says that one inch of rain over the whole catchment area of the Thames would make a river as deep and wide as Henley Reach and extending from London to the borders of Sutherlandshire. A graphic picture indeed !

After excessive rains the land becomes water-logged, and much of the late floods in these parts consisted of water that could not, for this reason, sink into the ground. The land-springs also then run more freely and some chalk springs which are usually dry burst out vigorously. " Trunk Ditch," near Ipsden, for example (see No. XVII), is now flowing merrily and forms a rushing torrent across a recently ploughed field. The spring at the " Leather Bottle " at Cleeve rose many inches during the flood and burst into the lower rooms of the inn, though the river water did not quite reach the front door.

In Whitchurch there is not only the overflow of the water itself as seen at the mill and in the riverside meadows, but also the water that comes from that rather mysterious ditch which leaves the river near the Coombe Park boat-house, passes through the Walliscote fields and garden, under the road just below the lane, and after crossing the bowling-green, joins the river again below " Thames Bank." One end of it is thus above lock and the other below. It is this ditch which floods the main road. It is well to remember that there is

always more flooding than meets the eye, unless one looks into cellars and gravel-pits, surface wells and cesspools, and then it is rather startling to find how near the water, or other fluid, stands to the surface. Up to a few years ago the road was often flooded near the bridge, but this was effectually stopped when the material removed from near the top of Whitchurch Hill, in order to improve the gradient, was dumped down on the lowest part of the road. In this way two useful purposes were served.

This winter's flood is the worst since 1915, which is said to have been a few inches higher. Neither of them was nearly as bad as that of 1894 when there were two feet eight inches of water in the bar of "The Swan" at Pangbourne, whereas this year there have been barely six inches. "In the last week of October," wrote Canon Slatter in 1894, "above 3 inches of rain fell bringing the river to full height; between 8th and 14th November another 3 inches fell and the water by 9 p.m. on the 16th inst. had risen higher than ever remembered by any inhabitant living. The water poured through the churchyard gate into the village street in a deep stream and down the lane, and the village street was flooded to about 10 yards above Dr. Bateman's door [Duchess Close]. There was in consequence no service at St. Mary's Church on 18th November."

Other rectors have left notes on earlier floods. James Etty wrote: "In the year 1768 November there was a greater flood than ever was known, the water rose to such a height as to be 2 feet deep in the barns at Mr. Wallis's [Walliscote] and at the parsonage, and for the ferry boat to go up to the house opposite to Mr. Whistler's" [probably the dairy]. And again, "Feb. 1770 there was another flood only 4 inches perpendicular lower than the former."

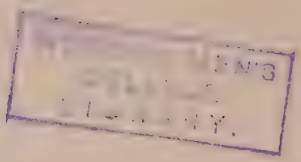
W. A. Hammond, Rector, wrote in January 1809: "There was a very high flood, the water reached up the street beyond Mr. Simeon's back gates [afterwards Sir John Simeon, Bt., who then lived at Walliscote] out of which it flowed with great rapidity. Part of the south and east wall in Mr. Simeon's kitchen garden was beaten down, and it stood 3 feet 8 inches in his offices. The height of the water at the parsonage house is marked by a notch in the upper stone step. Jan. 29th, no service in the church on account of the flood." The said parsonage, built in 1803, was pulled down and rebuilt in 1835, so this record on the step is lost, as is also the other at the toll house, which many of us remember and which was so unfortunately erased some years ago.

There was also "a very deep snow on April 21, 1809, and a high flood in consequence of it," which shows that floods may occur at any time of the year. In May 1882, I had the exciting and rather dangerous experience of sculling from Oxford to Teddington in a flood and losing my way in the meadows about Iffley. According to the *Daily Telegraph* of August 22, 1903, "the deluge in the Thames Valley in June is not to be paralleled by any records we possess. The injury then done to many thousands of acres of hay can only be compared to the disasters which now, it is to be feared, are irrevocable in the great wheat-growing districts."

Floods produce marvellously beautiful effects. They also teach us very ancient as well as modern history. Standing on the hill above Gatehampton in the early stages of a flood you will see a very obvious old river bed, part of which is the oblong pool shaded by elms, opposite Hart's Lock, a favourite haunt of snipe. Later, as the water rises, this is merged in the main stream and then another river bed shows itself further away, starting

near Basildon and joining the main stream above Pangbourne reach. At last a vast lake is formed, but in the course of its formation it has taught us how the river shifted its course from side to side whilst forming the "flood-plain" that is now the flat bottom of the "Gorge of Goring."

Floods are not quite useless, but they do us much more harm than good. "Give me neither poverty nor riches," said the wise man. And we grumble, "you may have too much of a good thing," and think of the Patriarch Noah as we see the well-known landmarks reappear, and rejoice in a return to normal conditions.



XLVIII

MARCH 1925

EARLY RECTORS OF WHITCHURCH

Ere yet, in scorn of Peter's pence,
And numbered bead, and shrift,
Bluff Harry broke into the spence
And turned the cowls adrift.

TENNYSON.

THE city of Lincoln is far away, but Roman roads had made communication with this part of the country easy in ancient times, and up to 1542 Whitchurch was included in its enormous diocese. I have lately obtained from the Lincoln Cathedral records the earliest information about our rectors. It takes us back to about the year 1210, when John was king. "Far away," you may say, "and long ago."

But we must, in order to understand their position, go back much further still and trace, in the merest outline, how parishes sprang into existence and reached the stage to which they had attained at the time of which we are speaking, namely, the thirteenth century.

When the Romans abandoned these islands the Christianity introduced by them almost disappeared in central and southern England before the heathen Saxon invaders. By degrees, however, the worship of the Saxon gods yielded to Christian influences coming from

two directions: the well-organized influence of Rome from the south and the less orderly but more emotional influence of Irish monks in the north. Monasteries sprang up all over the land, but the Christian inhabitants had to depend upon wandering monks for their spiritual consolations. The Parish, by which is meant a district round a church served by a resident priest (often a nobleman's chaplain), dates roughly from about A.D. 700. Parish churches were then built, and formed the centre of Saxon villages. The gain was obvious, but it was somewhat counterbalanced by the institution of tithes and the evils that grew out of them. Tithes were reasonable as long as they were altogether or mainly devoted to the service of the parish; but this easy way of raising, it might be said of extorting, money tempted avaricious churchmen both at home and abroad; and their bursting coffers proved an irresistible attraction to equally avaricious nobles and court officials.

For five hundred years whilst Saxons, Britons and Danes were engaged in deadly strife, it looked at times as if heathendom would again triumph over Christianity; but the Norman Conquest (1066), like a huge steam-roller, flattened out both secular and religious difficulties. Norman-French barons settled upon the land, Norman-French priests invaded the Church, English tithes and Peter's pence went to support foreign abbeys (see No. XLV) and the pomp of Rome; while the thoroughness with which the work was done is shown in the records of secluded little villages like ours.

The first Whitchurch rector we know of was Geoffrey de Dunevilla. He must have been Norman-French, though the modern name Dunville sounds English enough and is associated with a well-known brand of Irish whisky to-day. Let us study the terms of his

appointment: "Geoffry de Dunevilla, clerk to the church of Whytchircha, saving the vicarage of Silvester who shall hold the whole church with all its appurtenances, rendering 10 marks [a mark was worth 13s. 4d.] by the year to him who shall for the time being be parson [that is Geoffry de D.] of the same. . . . The vicar ought to be ordained to priests' orders at the next ordination, and serve the church personally in such wise, however, that all the days of his life he shall have dwelling with him a chaplain of honourable and praiseworthy character, who shall know and be able to minister confessions and other spiritual things to the parishioners in the tongue known to them."

A few pages further on, it is recorded that Silvester, deacon, was instituted on the conditions above stated with the consent of the patron and the parson of the said church.

Here are enough facts to enable us to draw a picture of the administration of Whitchurch parish in 1210. Dunevilla was at all events in holy orders, not, like many rectors of that time, a layman; but he was also certainly non-resident, his sole interest in the place being the receipt of £6 3s. 6d. a year from Silvester the vicar. Silvester (French Sylvestre) was as yet only a deacon. He could not speak English, and, what is more, it was evidently thought impossible for him ever to learn the language, for he undertook to keep an English-speaking chaplain *all the days of his life*. The parishioners therefore probably never saw or expected to see their rector; they heard the mass celebrated in Latin which they did not understand, while for confessions, churchings, and "other spiritual things" they trusted to the ministrations of an English chaplain "of honourable and praiseworthy character." The system involved a waste

of man-power and an ever-increasing burden upon the unfortunate inhabitants.

We may pass over the next rector, Thomas Esperun, subdeacon (1239–73), merely observing that his name sounds French (*éperon*, a spur), and that it was in his time that the Hide Chapel (see No. XII) was built.

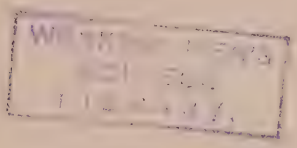
The next rector on the list played his ignoble part during one of the most sordid periods of English Church history. We read: "Adam de Stratton, subdeacon, to the church of Wittechirche, on the death of Thomas Esperun. Patron Isabella de Fortibus, Countess of Albermarle . . . 26th Sept. 1275." By this time it was common enough for one person, clerical or lay, to hold many benefices which he looked upon merely as sources of income. Stratton had acquired advowsons in almost every diocese in the kingdom; amongst others that of Checkendon, which he had held for at least five years. He probably never troubled himself to visit such an insignificant place as Whitchurch; but just put in a vicar and pocketed his share of the tithes.

A good deal is known about this Adam de Stratton. His name is probably derived from Stratton near Swindon in Wiltshire. He was the trusted confidant of that great lady Isabella de Fortibus, Countess of Albemarle, who also inherited the Earldom of Devon, the dominion of the Isle of Wight and one of the two hereditary Chamberlainships of the Exchequer. She was one of the richest and in consequence one of the most unhappy women of her time. She made de Stratton her deputy at the Exchequer, where he became well known at court and where he carried on his nefarious transactions. Amongst others he probably forged a charter under which Isabella agreed to surrender her birthright, and then affixed her seal to the forged documents. He acquired much

landed property all over the country, but mostly in London; his victims being churchmen, widows and orphans and embarrassed debtors to the Crown. At last when his fall was brought about, owing to a daring highway robbery, he was convicted—not merely accused, but convicted—of homicide, forgery of records, peculation, sorcery and other trespasses and enormities. His ill-gotten wealth amounted to £20,000 or £30,000 and his forfeited estates to £50,000, without including his "spiritualities," that is his advowsons. His life was spared "by reason of his clergy," and moreover he was in holy orders.

At his trial, in order to prove that he was a sorcerer, they produced a silk bag containing parings of nails, human hair, the feet of toads and moles, and other *diabolica*; but Adam tampered with the seal that had been affixed and threw the contents of the bag into a drain.

Here was a pretty Rector of Whitchurch! What became of him after 1290 is not certain. Some think he survived till 1327. If so he must have ceased to have any connection with this place, for the next rector on the list, Master Peter Gromville, died about 1310.



SOME MORE EARLY RECTORS

> Wide was his parish, and houses fer asonder
> But he ne left nought for no rain ne thonder,
> In sikenesse and in mischief to visite
> The ferrest in his parish, moche and lite,
> Upon his fete, and in his hand a staf.
>
> CHAUCER.

THE successors of wicked Adam de Stratton had strange names but left no other trace of their existence. Master Peter Gromville (died 1310), Robert de Hoga (instituted 1310), Nicholas de Faldeye (instituted 1336) and James de Audele (instituted 1346) were surely Norman-French. They take us on to the middle of the fourteenth century when England started on the so-called "hundred years war" with France, which lasted with some short intervals of peace from 1337 to 1453. It is not surprising that during this weary century of strife with France our rectors should have had honest English, not Norman, names. First comes Henry Wodecok (presented 1347). He survived the "Black Death," which was the same disease as the "Plague," and which raged in England in 1348–9, killing one-third of the population including a great number of priests. He was followed by John Bacoun (instituted 1367). Then comes William Hamund (died about

1375), Sir John de Walton (instituted 1375) about whom there is some doubt, Sir Nicholas Monk (instituted 1384), Sir Robert Old (instituted 1388–9), Thomas Elyot (instituted 1389), Master John de Southam (also instituted in 1389), Robert Newby (instituted 1395), John Compton (instituted 1413) and Thomas Lewkins, instituted 1422, the year when Henry VI came to the throne.

The history of our rectors becomes confused at this point. Do my readers remember Roger Gery, whose beautiful brass in the church and whose benefits to the parish were described in No. XI? I cannot bring these articles to a close without adding some information about him unearthed by Dr. Cooke during his researches into the history of Mapledurham. Gery's entrance into and exit from this parish are shrouded in mystery. It seems that he was a "pluralist," that is he had more than one living—a very common arrangement, though a bad one, which was only finally prohibited by the "Pluralities Act" of 1838. From 1437 to 1484 he was actually vicar of Mapledurham, and for a part of this time he was also rector of Dommer (now Dummer) near Basingstoke. Doubtless he worked the two parishes of Whitchurch and Mapledurham together and did not do much to earn his tithes from Dommer. We have no record of the date of his first institution as vicar of Whitchurch, but we do know that in 1457, two years after he had united the Vicarage to the Rectory, he gave place to a certain Brother John Argentyn, who resigned in 1462. Then Gery returned and continued to be rector here till 1483, the year before he died. He was an energetic man, for besides all that he did for Whitchurch he managed to get the endowment of Mapledurham increased. We gather incidentally that he secured the respect or affection of at least one of his

parishioners, Joan (or Jane) Iwardby, who left him in her will " my macer with ears that I drink in, on paire of beades corall, with beades of gold."

The beads were, no doubt, beads of a rosary. A macer, or as it should be spelt, maser, or mazer, was the common bowl or drinking cup of old days. It was originally made of wood, most frequently, it is said, of the spotted wood of the maple. In more luxurious times a silver rim was added, and, still later, the whole bowl was made of some precious metal and richly chased. Joan Iwardby's " macer " must have been one of these, and provided with the special adornment of ears, whatever they may have been.

Roger Gery was an old man when he died, for he had been vicar of Mapledurham for forty-seven years. We do not know whether he lived here or at Mapledurham, or whether he kept a house open in both parishes. His brass tablet shows that some time between 1455 and 1460 he had made up his mind to be buried here, but as it turned out he probably died at Mapledurham. So we may give our fancy play, and I like to picture his funeral procession passing along the bridle-path through Hardwick, and to believe that his last resting place was in our church or churchyard.

Gery (sometimes spelt Geery or Geary and in other ways) is an old English name, supposed to mean " changeable "—rather appropriate for one who was constantly going back and forth between his two parishes. The Gerys appear to have been a family of some importance in the neighbourhood of Chesham in Buckinghamshire.

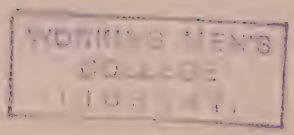
Now let us go back to John Argentyn, who occupies the stage for a brief period of five years, 1457–62. It must first be pointed out that Argentine, in several

different forms, is an old name which occurs in various European countries and strongly suggests silver and silver-smiths. Secondly, it has been generally assumed that our Brother John Argentyn was the John Argentine, M.D. and D.D., who became Provost of King's College, Cambridge, and whose "brass," giving the date of his death 1507, is to be seen in his chantry in King's College Chapel. It may be true; but if so he was made rector of Whitchurch in the same year that he was elected from Eton to King's College, when he could not have been more than a mere youth, and was unable to discharge the duties of a priest. Still such things did happen. I have searched all the available sources of information about him and find no mention in them of Whitchurch, though in later life he was a "pluralist" with a vengeance. He obtained the living of Hartest cum Boxted in Suffolk in 1487, of Glemsford in Suffolk in 1488, and the same year that of Cavendish in Suffolk. He also held that of St. Vedast in London and three prebends in succession in Lichfield Cathedral. In his capacity of Doctor of Medicine he was physician to Arthur, Prince of Wales, son of Henry VII, that delicate boy who was married at the tender age of fifteen to Catherine of Arragon (afterwards one of Henry VIII's numerous wives) and died a few months after his marriage. This John Argentine was a learned man and left behind him some satirical verses; but whether he was our John Argentyn is perhaps open to some doubt. There is a reference to another John Argentine, B.D., a Franciscan friar, in the Register of the University of Oxford under the date 1449. It was, however, uncommon for Grey Friars to be made parish priests before the dissolution of the friaries in 1538.[1]

[1] I have since discovered that our Rector was this Grey Friar.

We are now approaching the Reformation and it is not proposed to say more about our ancient rectors.

Possibly some who are historically inclined may care to hear that for many years there was much uncertainty as to the patronage of this living, as the following dull list of names and dates will show: Queen Margaret 1310, Queen Isabel 1336, Margery de la Becher 1346, the King " by reason of the lands of Margery late wife of Nicholas Beche being in his hands for certain causes " 1347, Edward Prince of Wales—the " Black Prince "—1367, the King 1375, 1384, 1388, 1389, 1395, 1413 and 1422, the Prince of Wales 1457, and finally the King again 1462 when Roger Gery was instituted the second time.



A FEW MORE RECTORS

And thus the whirligig of time brings his revenges.
SHAKESPEARE.

AFTER all, I must add one more chapter about rectors; one excuse being that, since the printing of the last, proof has been obtained that John Argentine, there mentioned, was the Grey Friar, not the Provost of King's.

Eight or perhaps nine rectors of Whitchurch intervened between the retirement of Roger Gery in 1483 and the beginning of Henry Whistler's long incumbency in 1616. The political changes during this period of 133 years were great, but still greater were those in the Church, as one party or another gained the upper hand and as upholders of one or another doctrine or tradition became in turn the persecuted or the persecutors. It is hard to realize that during the middle of this period, especially during the reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, our very ancestors used actually to burn one another at the stake for holding what they thought erroneous opinions. At the beginning of this period Catholicism was the accepted form of worship and there was so little "heresy" that there was scarcely any persecution. By the end of it, in James I's

reign, burning had gone out of fashion, but there was endless confusion and bitterness, for the Established Church, the Presbyterians and the Puritans were engaged in a triangular contest, while a mushroom growth of sects had sprung up, and the Roman Catholics gloomily occupied the background. The fundamental change of course took place in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI. In the former papal supremacy came to an end and the monasteries, abbeys, priories and friaries were disestablished and plundered. In Edward VI's reign an English Prayer Book was used. The inhabitants of Whitchurch no doubt wondered at the change of ritual, at the disappearance of the coloured images of saints from the church, and the paintings from its walls. It must have seemed strange to hear the name of the once-revered Pope of Rome treated with contempt, and, perhaps, to see an English Bible—once a forbidden book—chained to a desk in the church for all to read. They cannot fail to have heard that the Austin nuns had been dismissed from Goring. And much worse things they knew were being done in the name of religion. Chopping off heads—valuable heads, too—a common occurrence in those days, was apparently thought little of ; but a shudder must have passed over all this region when seven months after the dissolution and plundering of the magnificent Abbey of Reading, on November 15, 1539, the Abbot Hugh Farringdon and two monks were hung and quartered on a platform erected outside the Abbey gateway, and then thrown into a cauldron of boiling pitch.

Not much is known of the rectors of Whitchurch during this period ; the earlier and the later incumbents would hardly have been on speaking terms if they could have met. Though so little is known we may set up a

few historical milestones to show what was taking place during the incumbency of some of them. When Sir Robert Goseburn, priest, succeeded Master Roger Gery in 1483, the "Wars of the Roses" had been raging for thirty years, and they were just ending at the time of his resignation in favour of Master Thomas Persevale, priest, in 1487. Goseburn was made a fellow of Merton College, Oxford, in 1470, and Proctor in 1479, and had been tutor to the Duke of York, son of Edward IV, one of the unfortunate princes who were murdered in the Tower of London in 1483. Thomas Percyvall (another way of spelling his name) was Rector for forty years. You may read his simple brass plate in the church by craning your neck and straining your eyes. It says that he died on July 7, 1533. He had resigned in January 1526–7 being followed by Master William Wright, priest, who undertook to pay him an annual pension of £10, but only lived to make two of these payments. In the year of Thomas Percivale's death (modern spelling) Anne Boleyn was publicly crowned Queen. Henry VIII had recently divorced Catherine of Aragon, had wrung from the unwilling clergy an acknowledgment of himself as supreme head of the Church, and had been excommunicated by the Pope. But he had not actually begun his attack upon the monasteries.

William Wright's will, dated 1528, conjures up a picture of a typical old Catholic priest, and by its quaint wording, promiscuous spelling and curious bequests cannot fail to excite a smile. It reads as follows:

"In the name of God, Amen. I, Sir William Wright, Rector of Wytchurch, of good mynde and hole memory make my last will and testament after this maner of fourme as followeth: First I bequethe my soule to

almighty god, our Lady saint mary and all the company of hevyn, my body to be buried in the parishe Churche of saint Laurence in Redynge before the awter of the name of Jesu." After sundry pious bequests it continues: "Item to every householde having noo plowe in Wytchurch a busshell of barlye and iiijd. in money. Item to Sir George Osprynge my best gowne and a doblet of worsted. Item to Sir Richard Alwoode my Chamlet Jaket and my Chamlet Doblet. Item to Paynter's wife, my keeper, my best black gowne. Item to Sir John Maynford my Manuell [a book containing the occasional offices which a priest was bound to perform, such as baptism, extreme unction, and the processional services]. Item to William Turner all my pricksong bokes [music written down] notwithstanding yf the residue of my goods be not sufficient to pay my dettes I will that all these bequests afore rehearsed be solde and made money of to pay my dettes."

The see of Oxford was separated from that of Lincoln in 1542. The last rector mentioned in the records of Lincoln Cathedral is Master John Olyver "bachelor in degrees" on the death of Sir William Wryght in September 1528. Apparently he is the same John Olyver "doctour of ye Civile Lawe" whose will was proved on June 3rd, 1552, he therefore survived the foundation of the see of Oxford by ten years. It is a curious will. There are numerous bequests to the prisoners in London gaols and to the "poore folke at Bedham," which suggest that he was a lawyer. But it continues: "Item I give and bequeathe to the olde wydowes and fatherlesse and motherlesse children of the parish of Wolstanton in Staffordshire where I was some tyme parson xx li (pounds) charging myne executors to se yt distributed within a quarter of a yere after my death amones theym accord-

inglye as they will annswere for yt at the daye of Judgement." So he evidently was also a parson. He makes a similar bequest to Kings Taynton [Kingsteignton in Devonshire ?] " where I am parson and prebendarie " ; and another to Yolhampton [Woolhampton ?] " where I am prebendary and parson " ; and twenty pounds " to the poore maydens of Mynster in the Isle Tenente [Thanet] . . . to be distributed amonges them at the tyme of their marriage." He was well off, for he makes many bequests to private individuals and to the poor in various parts of London. He was confessedly a pluralist and it is thus disappointing to find no mention of Whitchurch in his will. Probably he had very little to do with us, for according to the *Dictionary of National Biography* he was an important person, at one time Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, and at another a Master in Chancery. He was one of the young men brought forward by Wolsey and was frequently employed in Henry VIII's litigations ; he was thus more of a lawyer than a parson ; but he nevertheless drew a good revenue from the Church. His curate or curates who did the work for him remain unknown and are therefore unsung.

There is some uncertainty about even the names of the next succeeding rectors and curates. We are consequently unable to vouch for the complete accuracy of the following list. Oliver Smith followed John Olyver and died in 1558–9. Robert Norwood succeeded him in 1556 and died 1591. Weslley (or William ?) Thomson was instituted in 1592 and died in 1596. He was followed by Thomas Singleton, about whom and his curate Peter Winder, whose brass in the church was described in No. XIII, we know some interesting details. Thomas Singleton was a bachelor of theology and, though a Cambridge student, became an important

person at Oxford, where he was twice Vice-Chancellor and Principal and Bursar of Brasenose College. He was apparently an indifferent keeper of accounts, for when he made his will in 1610 his pricking conscience forced him to leave two hundred pounds for "such somes of money as have come to my handes and not accompted for in the turbulent and disturbed estate of the Colledge from which God in his good tyme did deliver it . . . not that even I did misrecken wittingly or kept any money in my handes with intent to defraude." As years advanced he still felt uneasy about a youthful and too boisterous frolic of his student days. He leaves ten pounde to King's College, Cambridge, "to be bestowed upon some Cloth or Cushion or other ornament for their Communion table, Pulp-itt or otherwise in their Chappell in satisfaction of some injurie I did to that place in my undiscreet youth therunto drawne by others." The only clause, however, that really interests us is: "to my lovinge Kinsman Thomas Speake dwellinge in the Benefice of Whitchurch in the county and diocesse of Oxon all my cattell there of what sorte soever, all my corne, plate, beddinge, household stuffe, goods and chattells whatsoever so that he discharge all wages and dewties whatsoever hereafter arising by reason of that Benefice and that of the plate above mentioned he deliver the white double silver Salte and two silver Cuppes to my cousin Isaac Singleton now parson there at my gifte." This shows that though Thomas Singleton was a busy man in Oxford—he was Vice-Chancellor in 1611—he had a house here and kept in touch with what was going on. The will was made in 1610, the year that his nephew (he calls him cousin) took over the living. He, Isaac Singleton, held it till 1616 when Henry Whistler's long incumbency of fifty-six years began. (See No. XIII.)

WORKING MEN'S
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THE HOUSE-FLY

No. 1

Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.—ECCLESIASTES x. 1.

Busy, curious, thirsty fly!
Drink with me and drink as I:
Freely welcome to my cup,
Couldst thou sip and sip it up:
Make the most of life you may,
Life is short and wears away.

WILLIAM OLDYS (1696–1761).

NOTHING definite is known about the date or personality of the sage Koheleth, who was responsible for the wise sayings in Ecclesiastes. That he was a pessimist is obvious; but he was an acute observer. Though he knew nothing about microbes or the nature of decomposition and infection, he noted accurately one cause of an ointment turning rancid and he drew the appropriate moral that a little folly may do untold harm. How much wiser he was than the eighteenth-century antiquary William Oldys, whose poetical output seems to be confined to the well-known but misleading song quoted above. He was courting disaster by his stupid

invitation, as anyone can see who studies the filthy habits of the common " House-fly."

This insect is of world-wide distribution. It follows mankind into every hot and temperate corner of the globe, and even further afield. It is the subject of countless proverbs, fables and poems; but only in recent years has it been shown to what an extent it brings disease and death to its human friends who confidently cater for all its wants.

There is an enormous variety of flies, of which quite a number make their way into houses. For example, the buzzing " Blue-Bottle " or " Blow-fly," the smaller beautiful glistening " Green-fly," the " Green-bottle-fly," the large " Drone-fly " which crawls into pipes and crannies in the autumn, and some others which closely resemble the house-fly. In towns and villages the two commonest are the " House-fly " and the " Lesser House-fly." The latter is not, as is often thought, a young house-fly. Insects do not grow larger after they have emerged from the " pupa " (or chrysalis) state; but flies, like human beings, may vary in size owing to variations in food, temperature, and other causes. The lesser house-fly is very common. Sometimes it is the only kind to be seen in a room, circling round the ceiling in an apparently aimless way. Its habits are like those of the house-fly, though it is said to be less fond of human food. This may be true, but it very often finds its way into our jam-pots through the spoon-hole in the lid!

Near stables and cow-sheds the " Stable-fly " abounds. It is an out-of-doors fly, but it often wanders into houses. It is very like the common house-fly, and is closely related to it though belonging to the dangerous class of blood-sucking flies which includes the " tsetse-fly " that carries " sleeping sickness " from animals to men. The

stable-fly may easily be recognized by its pointed proboscis which is always sticking out, whereas the tongue of the common fly is folded back when not in use. It holds its wings rather further apart when at rest. There is no fear of mistaking it when it bites you, drawing its drop of blood, though many people still take it for a specially vicious house-fly. An early recollection of mine is seeing them sting my grandfather's ankles through his white stockings. Cattle and horses know them well; they settle upon them in black, quivering patches and seem to cause intolerable itching; but they are not the flies that make the cows raise their tails in air and tear about the field in hot weather. From the time of Virgil (Georg. iii. 148) this panic is thought to be due to dread of the "Bot fly," the mere sound of its hum being supposed to be enough to cause a stampede; it is doubtful, however, whether this is more than a time-honoured superstition. There are other stinging flies, e.g. the Horse-fly.

The stable-fly is not nearly so dangerous to man as either of the house-flies. The blue-bottle is as bad or worse. But we must now leave its low companions and concentrate upon the common house-fly (*musca domestica*) itself.

These make their appearance in the first warm days of spring; but, though they have been so closely studied, there is still some uncertainty as to what becomes of them in winter. The greater number, no doubt, die in the autumn; a few survive in a more or less active state in kitchens or other hot rooms; but some authorities doubt if this is the whole story. They usually begin to breed in June, though eggs have been seen, and seen to hatch, in warm cellars during the winter. The favourite breeding place is recently thrown-out stable manure,

but any decaying animal or vegetable refuse will answer the purpose. A number of flies often collect together to deposit their eggs, which are like minute grains of rice and visible to the naked eye. They are terribly prolific insects. One fly may lay five or six batches of a hundred to a hundred and fifty eggs in one season; and the first brood may begin to lay eggs three weeks after the eggs from which they were hatched were deposited. On these data the ingenious but futile calculation has been made that "if the progeny of a single pair of flies, assuming that they all lived, were pressed together at the end of the summer they would occupy a space of about a quarter of a million cubic feet."[1] But of course a very large number perish as we shall see later.

Once hatched the "busy curious fly" starts on a double life. Out of doors it seeks the filthiest ordure, often reeking with disease germs. Indoors it is equally fond of most of our eatables, especially sweet things; and, being curious, what it does not eat or drink it walks over, tasting or testing it with its tongue.

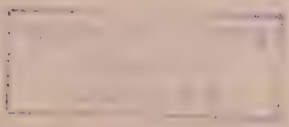
This tongue, or proboscis, is a beautiful object under a low power of the microscope. It is admirably fitted for sucking up and filtering liquids; but it cannot tackle dry things. So when a fly browses on a lump of sugar, you may be sure that it is bringing up—either from its "salivary" glands, or the large crop provided by Nature, some liquid with which to moisten the surface. And, when they are not feeding, flies put out (or, as it is called, vomit) the contents of their crops many times a day. They usually swallow it again, but some remains behind, and it is not pleasant to think that a previous meal may have contained the germs of typhoid fever, tubercle, summer diarrhœa, or other poisons. Moreover, they

[1] *House-flies and How they Spread Disease*, by C. G. Hewitt.

COOMBE END FARM HOUSE, SOUTH-EAST VIEW

deposit the contents of their bowel with impartiality over windows and ceilings, where the black spots are easily seen, and upon our food and feeding utensils, where they escape notice. Careful observations, made by Graham Smith, Purvis and others, show that a well-fed fly will deposit over thirty spots of one kind and another in twenty-four hours. To make matters worse, they are hairy creatures and, though they are constantly cleaning themselves, they cannot get rid of all the mess they have picked up in their travels.

The house-fly is known to carry the germs of typhoid (which killed as many men as the enemy's bullets in the Boer War), summer diarrhœa, so fatal to infants in our cities, tuberculosis (flies are specially attracted by sputum), ophthalmia, anthrax, cholera, probably the plague, and many other diseases the names of which are unknown to the inhabitants of Whitchurch. In 1913 a heifer bred on this farm developed anthrax, probably from this cause, and one of the farm hands was infected with it but was fortunately cured by prompt treatment at the Reading hospital. In Egypt one sees children's faces covered with flies which the superstitious mothers think it unlucky to brush away, and a large proportion of the population are blind of one or both eyes in consequence. The horrid sight recalls the vivid description of the plague of flies: "And there came a grievous swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies," which is a suitable quotation to close this chapter of horrors. The ways of dealing with them provided by nature and devised by man will be considered next month.



THE HOUSE-FLY

No. 2

Prevention is better than cure.
You will catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a cask of vinegar.

AS if to make amends for the harm that flies do, Nature has given them a host of enemies. It is strange enough that nearly all animals are liable to diseases of some sort, but stranger still that these diseases are so often carried by parasites peculiar to themselves. The particular parasite cannot exist without the particular animal it attacks. It is so with man. It is so with the house-fly.

In the autumn you may see flies fixed to a window-pane with proboscis down and legs stretched out into an unnatural position. They are either actually or almost dead, and in a short time a white mist will spread from them for a little distance over the glass. The mist is produced by a minute fungus which, after settling on the fly, punctured its skin and gradually occupied the whole of its interior, from which it is now spreading. On examining it with a lens it is found to consist of extremely fine threads and what are probably spores

(seeds). This fungus is a common and the most fatal disease of flies.

Good sight and a pocket lens will often discover small red or orange-coloured animals just like miniature scorpions sticking to the legs or bodies of flies ; but it is not yet known whether they do any harm, or whether they have simply clung on to the fly in order to get a lift from one place to another.

It is less easy to detect the clusters of small mites sometimes found sticking to the body of a fly.

All these can be seen with the naked eye, and there are several other parasites which only a trained observer can make out with his microscope.

There is a tiny fly which lays its eggs in the bodies of house-flies and their grubs, and so causes their death. Then there are larger insects—wasps for example—which capture a goodly number for food. Flies are also the natural prey of spiders. Some birds—fly-catchers, wagtails, swallows, and many others—include them in their insect food. So that altogether, what with these and frogs and toads, bats, fly-traps, inclement weather and one thing and another, the life of the house-fly is a perilous adventure.

But it would never do to trust to Nature's kind assistance. Our slovenly methods of dealing with stable manure and household refuse are to a large extent accountable for the plague of flies, and it is up to us to " stay " it if we can by every means in our power. Let us inquire how to set about it.

First their breeding-places should be attacked. The ideal thing would be to keep what is taken out of the stable in a fly-proof brick receptacle until it was well rotted, when it would have no attraction for the flies ; but, though this would increase the value of the manure,

it is more than can be expected of the struggling farmer. The next best thing is to make shapely dumps of the manure and to press down firmly each fresh shovelful, instead of throwing it loosely on to the top of the heap. This gives the flies less chance of depositing their eggs, and also the mass heats more quickly; even a moderate temperature is too much for the grubs.

A more laborious and less effectual plan—based on the same principle—is to turn over the whole surface of the dump every day or two. And a third, which may be combined with either of the others, is to apply some antiseptic or fly-killing substance such as chloride of lime. Some of these fly-poisons, however, are dangerous to the inhabitants of the farmyard: others may do harm to the crops.

So much for the farmers. I am afraid none of us is perfect; I myself cannot escape the pillory, but at all events I have made some good resolutions.

Now for the householder—big or little—whether he lives in a mansion, a "residence," a shop, a farm or a cottage. He ought to know that the rubbish heap is a source of danger, and should cover up, or place in fly-proof receptacles, or burn, any refuse in which flies can lay their eggs, and not by any chance give the blue-bottle the opportunity of "blowing" meat or carrion. It ought not to be necessary to say that the most dangerous of all breeding and feeding places for flies, the old insanitary privy, should be banished from the face of the earth. In making methodical attacks upon the breeding grounds of flies, we are following the example of those who have exterminated yellow-fever and malaria from places where these diseases raged, by draining the pools in which mosquitoes bred, or pouring oil on the surface of those that could not be so dealt with.

In spite of all our efforts, however, there is no immediate prospect of keeping flies out of our houses or from marauding our fruit trees, though it ought to be possible to keep them out of the two most important places, the dairy and the larder. In the garden, fly-traps should be used, of which there is a great variety. None is simpler or better than a glass preserve jar partly filled with some sweet fluid. Indoors, fly-papers may be hung up, such as are hawked about with the inhuman cry of "catch-em-alive," as if that were any gratification. The sticky substance, "tangle-foot," may be made by mixing five parts (by weight) of castor oil with eight parts of resin and heating the mixture till the resin is dissolved —not longer. This may be painted on glazed paper or wire and must be renewed as soon as it loses its stickiness. Of the really efficient fly *poisons* some are too dangerous to recommend for general use. Those containing formalin are the least noxious. A full description of them would occupy too much space in the magazine, and it would be wrong to describe them incompletely. Full information may be obtained in the British Museum Natural History Pamphlets on the House-fly (Economic Series, No. 1 and No. 1a. Of the two No. 1a is the better and costs 1s. 6d. No. 1 is shorter and costs 3d.)

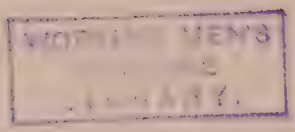
The last but by no means the least important line of defence against the freebooters who have flown in through the window of the dining-room or crawled under the door of the larder, is to cover up all food (especially sweets and meat) upon shelf and table, and never, oh never, to allow the noxious insects to crawl over baby's face as it sleeps in the cradle or perambulator, or to share in the windy pleasure of its "comforter."

In this number and the last we have very briefly dealt with the history and doings of one fly only. When we

see the hosts of insects of all shapes and sizes disporting themselves in the sunshine of an English summer day, and when we hear the stories of those of our race who have lived in hot climates, we are reminded of what Sir Arthur Shipley tells us in his instructive and entertaining book, *Life*, that, roughly speaking, nearly half a million species of insects are known, that is about three times as many as of all the other animals put together. They are the most dominant creatures on the earth and have very much to be reckoned with in the "struggle for existence."

[*Extract from a letter to a neighbour, dated August* 8, 1921.]

"When I come to the bottom of my widow's cruse of omniscience I shall buy a white sheet and devote a number to my errors."



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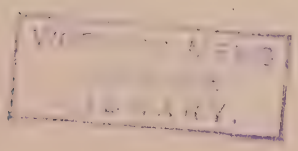

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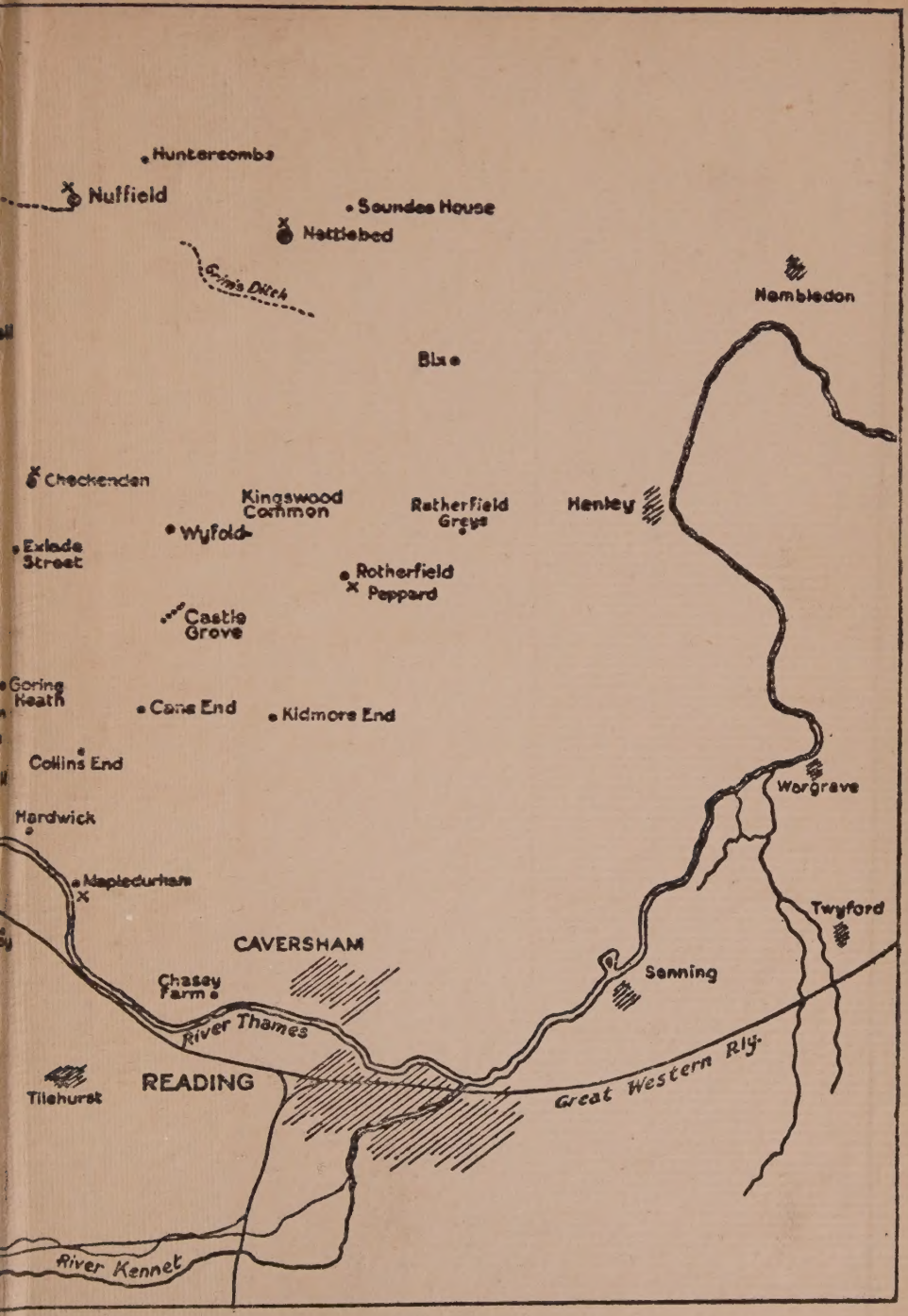
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